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**RORY BLOCK**

**JOHN LEVENTHAL**

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A photograph of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a brown long-sleeved shirt and a colorful patterned wrap, kneeling in a forest. She is focused on planting a young tree sapling into the soil. Her hands are visible as she works. Another person's arm is partially visible on the right, also assisting with the plant. The background is a lush, green forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The image has a white wavy border at the top and bottom.

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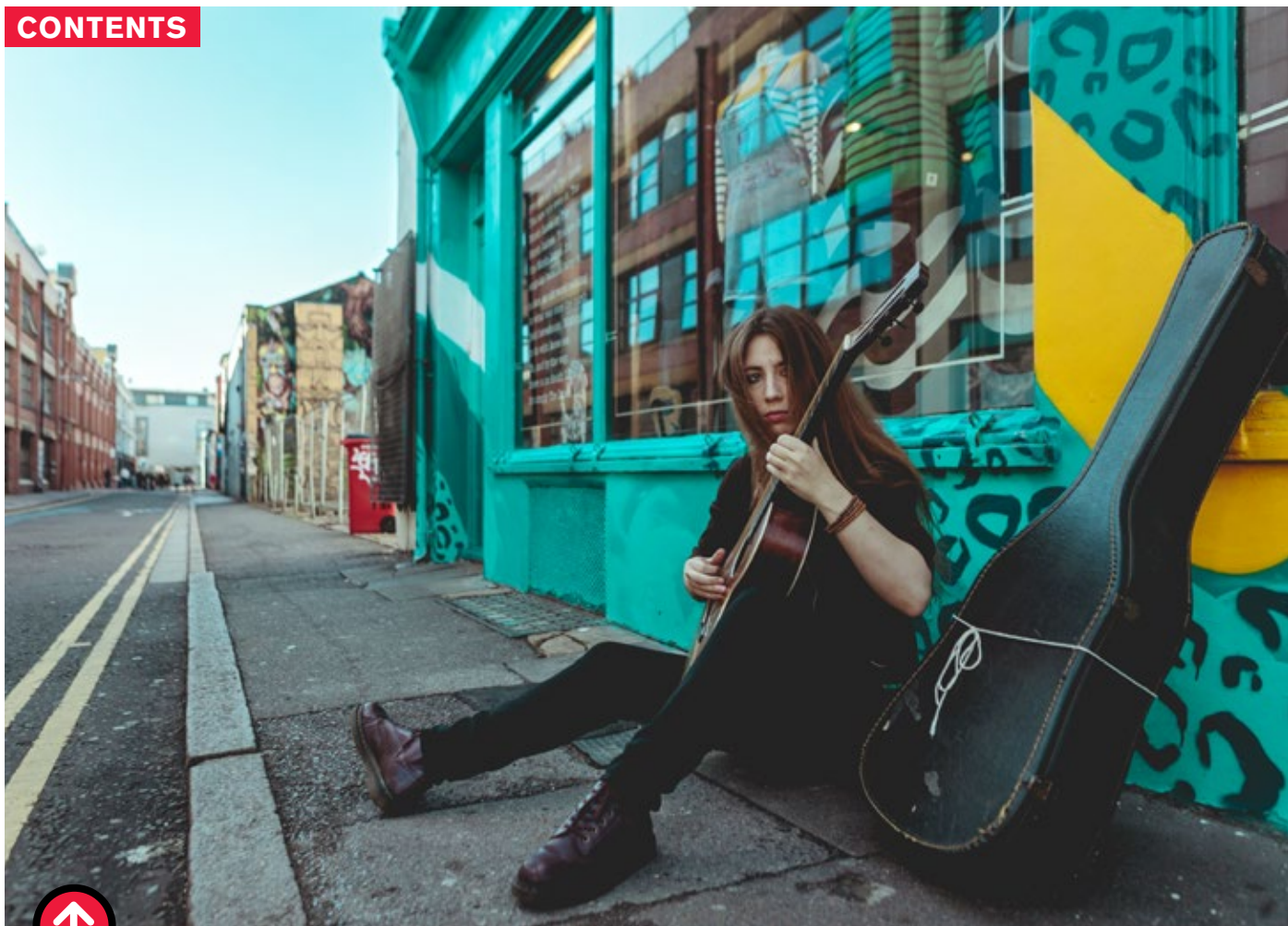
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**'I think the great signature of Americanness on this music is a very cinematic sense of expanse—I find it both isolating and comforting, and somehow nostalgic.'**

**GWENIFER RAYMOND**

p.32

## Features

### **16 Turn Up the Quiet**

Learn the bluesy fundamentals of Eric Clapton's acoustic style

**By Adam Levy**

### **24 Blues Power!**

Rory Block slides in to a new tribute series

**By Blair Jackson**

## Special Focus Fingerstyle Techniques

### **32 Next-Gen Fingerstyle**

Tips and more from five rising stars: Christie Lenée, Brooks Robertson, Daniel Bachman, Sarah Louise Henson, and Gwenifer Raymond

**By Richard Bienstock**

## Miscellany

**10** The Front Porch

**12** Feedback

**29** Holiday Gift Guide

**70** Acoustic Guitar Showcase

**81** Ad Index

### **November 2018**

Volume 29, No. 5, Issue 311

### **On the Cover**

Eric Clapton

### **Photograph**

Courtesy of *MTV Unplugged*, 1992





## SETUP

### 14 Guitar Talk

The Southern sound of producer, songwriter, and guitarist John Leventhal

## PLAY

### 40 Here's How

Navigating online guitar auctions

### 44 The Basics

How to build scales, part 2

### 48 Woodshed

Learn to play Mary Flower's "Liberal Rag"

### 52 Weekly Workout

Explore dropped-D fingerpicking

## SONGS

### 56 Layla

The *Unplugged* version of Eric Clapton's classic

### 62 It Is Well with My Soul

A popular hymn with sad origins

### 64 B.B.

An appealing instrumental from Nathan Salsburg

## AG TRADE

### 68 Ask the Expert

Why is my action suddenly high?

### 74 Review: Cort CJ-Retro

Old-school look, good value

### 76 Review: Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Q-Discrete

An affordable grab-and-go "blues box"

### 78 Review: Zero Glide Nut System

Converting from standard to zero-fret nut

### 78 Review: D'Addario Self-Centering Cradle Capo

Efficient and affordable yoke-style capo

## MIXED MEDIA

### 79 Playlist

Fingerstylist Mark Vickness' virtuosic solo debut; a sensuous excursion from Cecilia Zabala; Ahi's gritty *In Our Time*; gospel and blues from Jim Pharis

### 82 Great Acoustics

Two 1931 Kel Kroydon KK-1s



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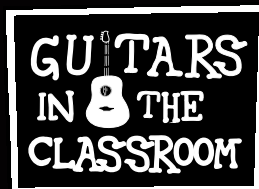
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### Video Exclusives



Christie Lenée

#### FINGERSTYLE STYLE STUDY

Five rising fingerstyle stars—Christie Lenée, Brooks Robertson, Daniel Bachman, Sarah Louise Henson, and Gwenifer Raymond—share secrets and demonstrate their unique techniques. (p. 32)



#### CORT CJ-RETRO

A budget jumbo with vintage looks. (p. 74)



#### 'LIBERAL RAG'

Learn Mary Flower's relaxed, approachable rag. (p. 48)



#### WEEKLY WORKOUT

Dropped-D fingerpicking fundamentals. (p. 52)

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Eric Clapton



**T**ake a trip with me to 1992, when streaming was how you described sunlight, trolls were mythic cave dwellers who sometimes ate children, friends were people you hung out with, and Eric Clapton, England's archetypal rock guitarist, stunned the pop music world with an acoustic album of classic blues, R&B, and a handful of originals called *Unplugged*.

*Acoustic Guitar* magazine was barely two years old when we released what would become our best-selling issue ever, September/October 1992, with Clapton and his Martin 000-42 on the cover and a feature on the phenomenon called *MTV Unplugged*. (Like the issue you're reading now, it included a transcription of "Layla," and if you still have that 26 year-old magazine, forgive us for repeating ourselves!)

In many ways, we have been riding the wave of that moment ever since, an acoustic music explosion that has unearthed many surprises, birthed many changes, and given us many reasons to be grateful. *Unplugged* was not its sole cause, but certainly its most stunning. In much the same way Bob Dylan turned folk music on its head by plugging in, Clapton's celebration of the flattop steel-string gave every rocker a moment of self-examination, every traditionalist a shot in the arm, and—perhaps most importantly—every up-and-coming artist a new definition of what it means to play guitar.

"Turn up the Quiet," Adam Levy's examination of Clapton's acoustic guitar style, aided by longtime Clapton sideman Andy Fairweather Low, is the centerpiece of this issue of *Acoustic Guitar*, and every reader will want to give it real attention. There's much more, too, in a related vein, including a report on blueswoman Rory Block's latest project and a lesson by Mary Flower on her original ragtime tune, "Liberal Rag." No spoilers here on where the song gets its name—you'll have to turn to page 48.

You'll also want to meet—and learn from—the next generation of steel-string fingerstylists, profiled here by Richard Bienstock, while exploring dropped-D fingerpicking with Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, and learning Steve Baughman's fingerstyle arrangement of the gospel favorite "It Is Well with My Soul."

On the gear side, you'll find insightful reviews of guitars and accessories (watch and listen to their video counterparts on *AcousticGuitar.com*), as well as Mamie Minch's deep dive into that perennial question, "Why Is my action suddenly high?"

My questions for you are these: Where does Eric Clapton sit in your pantheon of guitar greats? And how did *Unplugged* impact you? Please drop me a note at [David.Lusterman@Stringletter.com](mailto:David.Lusterman@Stringletter.com).



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## FEEDBACK

### STEEL-STRING THEORY

I noticed your September article about playing “Lágrima” on a steel-strung guitar—in particular, the part where the author mentions that the melody notes should be played *apoyando* (rest stroke) to accentuate the tune. I’ve been playing classical guitar for some time and I recently started looking for a steel-strung guitar with the intention of playing it exactly like a classical guitar, but just extending my repertoire to folk and other genres.

The first thing I found was that almost all steel acoustics have narrow necks and bridges.

The standard classical is 52mm at the nut and about 60mm at the saddle/bridge. The standard steel is between 42mm and 45mm at the nut and tends to vary between 50mm and 55mm at the bridge. This is simply too narrow for fingerpicking for most people unless they have small hands. The narrow nut makes fingering counterpoint very awkward and the narrow bridge makes *apoyando*, for example, virtually impossible—you need to be able to open up your right hand and use your fingers like a brush, not a claw. These guitars are designed for use with a pick.

So I started trawling the internet to see if there was a steel-string guitar that could be used without compromising classical technique. Bearing in mind the thinner gauge of steel strings, a nut of 48mm would be fine but the bridge string separation would still have to be about 60mm. And after months of searching, I finally found one. The Martin 028-VS series has exactly these measurements and can be played like a classical guitar with ease.

It’s interesting that this guitar is part of what they call the “Vintage Series” and is a copy of an old Martin. I guess it must mean that guitars from that era had wider necks than their modern counterparts. Perhaps that’s why so many people seem to seek out older guitars rather than new ones—because they’re easier to play. With the growing (I think) interest in fingerstyle guitar, maybe some clued-in manufacturer can introduce a line specially designed for this. I’m sure it would be popular.

—Peter Webb, via email

### HAVE A CIGAR?

While searching the net for interesting guitar videos, I encountered one on 3- and 4-string cigar-box guitars. I thought, “How can what seems to me a kind of guitar subculture be so ignored?” No, they’re not beautiful (although they are handmade), and they don’t cost what for most of us is impossible money, but they do look easy to play and they sound great. If they can serve to get more people into stringed instruments how can they be disregarded? Remember when snowboarding was introduced? Snowboarders and their proponents were scorned. It didn’t turn out to mean the end of skiing; it was just something else to do on snow. Go online and find a guy on a cigar-box guitar playing “La Grange” and not like it . . . I dare you!

—Gordon Barnes, via email

### THE HUSTLER

Thank you for your review of *The Essential Eric Andersen* in the September 2018 issue. I have a couple of corrections: “The Hustler” is not about Bob Dylan. The CD version has 33 tracks and the digital version has 42. (The review states 23 tracks.)

—Nick Loss-Eaton, via email



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Leventhal with his 1939 Gibson J-35; nearby is a 1964 Guild F-30.



**GUITAR TALK**

COURTESY OF JOHN LEVENTHAL

## Manhattan Address, Southern Sound

**Producer, songwriter, guitarist John Leventhal is an exquisite musical craftsman**

BY MARK SMALL

**L**ike many Baby Boomers, guitarist, songwriter, and record producer John Leventhal reflects the musical influences he heard growing up. The Beatles, Doc Watson, Chet Atkins, Howlin' Wolf, Curtis Mayfield, Clarence White, and many others color his playing and musical sensibilities. He's a lifelong New Yorker, yet his guitar work has a rootsy sound and feel that seems to hark back to another place and time. Leventhal has played in the studio with countless artists, written songs, and produced albums for his wife—Rosanne Cash—as well as Shawn Colvin, Joan Osborne, Rodney Crowell, soul singer William Bell, and many more, netting five Grammy Awards in the process.

He bought his first guitar—a Gibson J-50—during his senior year in high school. (It was stolen a year later.) He has since collected many vintage acoustics from Gibson, Martin, and

Guild, in addition to classic electrics—including his trademark Fender Telecaster.

Leventhal's production style these days is characterized by transparent textures and an economic use of carefully-crafted instrumental parts. In addition to guitar, he frequently lays down bass, drums, keyboards, and percussion tracks. Cash's 2014 album *The River & the Thread*, which won three Grammys, is a showcase for Leventhal's pristine playing and production style. The album was the fruit of a journey Cash and Leventhal took down Highway 61 from Memphis to New Orleans. Its songs capture a bit of the musical and cultural essence of America's southland.

I caught up with Leventhal at his Manhattan studio just after he finished working on Cash's latest, *She Remembers Everything*, and before he and Cash embarked on a summer tour of Europe.

**Is it true that you were in your late teens when you got your first guitar?**

Yeah, I came to guitar a little late. I loved music and knew a few cowboy chords, but I didn't get my first electric guitar until my senior year in college, when I was 20. I didn't see a path to becoming a professional musician until I was older. I started moving toward it when I was in my early 20s. I was faced with the prospect of becoming a lawyer and working with my father, so I thought I'd at least try music. It was pure dumb luck that I was able to make it all work.

**Was becoming a record producer in your plan?**

I made my first record with Shawn Colvin in 1988, and I wasn't trying to become a record producer. I was just a musician who wanted to write songs and was lucky enough to have met Shawn and things clicked. When her record



hit and won a Grammy, I thought that maybe I could produce records. But I just wanted to be a songwriter and have the opportunity to make records with the songs I wrote.

#### **Do you start with a guitar riff, chord progression, or melody?**

Through the years, I've approached songwriting and collaborating from every conceivable viewpoint. I've written with guitar, piano, drum set, and in my head. I've put music to lyrics and written music others have put lyrics to. I've sat in a room with a blank slate and through the miraculous process of collaborating, we've written something on the spot. There isn't a way I haven't approached it, and that's a conscious decision. There's no point in getting bogged down in a preconceived way of writing. You have to open your heart and mind and pray that the muse comes through.

#### **How do you choose which guitar to use in the studio?**

There's no specific selection process. I have certain guitars that I know are good for a song that needs a sweet-sounding strum. If it's a fingerpicking part that needs an elegant midrange thing, I have guitars for that. I love old acoustic guitars, they are my one material vice, but I see them as tools.

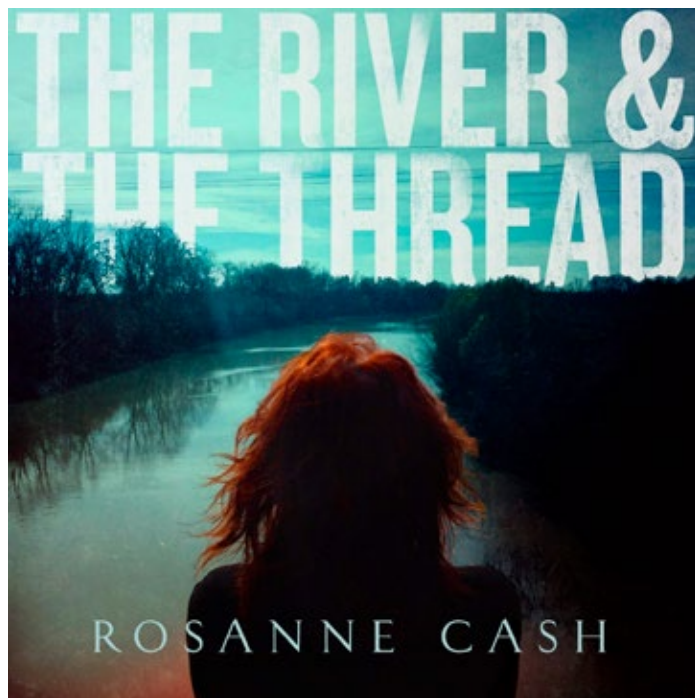
#### **What's your approach for getting such great acoustic guitar sounds live and on record?**

Live and recording are utterly different worlds for me. The gear requirements are very different. In the studio you want the microphone to translate your ideas musically to a recording. That's different from playing live in a theater and getting your sound and musical ideas out to a thousand people. I don't bring my vintage guitars on the road; I have a Collings OM and a Bourgeois OM that I play live. I use a Fishman Rare Earth soundhole pickup that I run through an array of guitar pedals, including tremolo and delay. I put that through a Fender amp. I also have an undersaddle pickup that goes direct to the house and the two signals are blended 50-50. It's not stereo, but the two sounds create a pretty musical voice for me live.

In the studio, a lot of times I'll play my 1944 Martin 000-21; it's a really great

recording guitar. The mic that has been the sound of my acoustic guitars on record for over a decade has been a Microtech Gefell UMT 70 S, a large-diaphragm condenser mic. I use it with a Geoff Daking preamp and an Empirical Labs Distressor for a little compression to keep the dynamics contained. For the most part, I place the mic halfway between the soundhole and where the neck meets the body. Most of the time I record acoustic guitars in mono, although on Rosanne's new album I experimented with recording the guitars in stereo. That's complicated because you don't hear guitars in stereo in the real world.

Among my other guitars are a 1946 Gibson Southern Jumbo and a 1956 J-45. I also have



a late 1930s J-35 and a 1962 J-50. So basically, one Gibson dreadnought or jumbo from each decade between 1930 and 1960. They're all excellent recording instruments, each with its own character

#### **Can you share thoughts on the development of your guitar style?**

I had an epiphany that the strongest suit I had to play was what made me different from other guitarists. I had a slightly eccentric approach to the guitar and felt I'd be better off maximizing that, rather than trying to fit into someone else's idea of what a good guitar player is. It was powerful to have that epiphany and move toward it. I'm glad I did because it led me to a decent career.

[Asked what about his style is eccentric, Leventhal showed me how he tucks the pick into his right hand so he can mute strings with his thumb while fingerpicking with the other digits, and then instantly switch to the pick for more articulation of the bass notes or to strum chords. He uses a large triangular pick, a 1.5mm Dunlop Primetone Sculpted Plectra. With this pick, he says, "It feels like I'm pulling the tone out of the string. I go for a bit of a thump on the low end. I want to bring out the low mids."]

#### **Do you and Rosanne tour mainly as a duo?**

We do about 50 dates per year, but we also have a band in which I play a Telecaster and acoustic guitar. When we go out as a duo, I just bring an acoustic guitar. The duo has developed into a wonderful thing. People like it, the overhead is low, and we make a decent living with it.

#### **What can you say about Rosanne's upcoming album?**

I produced half of it and she did the other half with a great engineer named Tucker Martine from Portland, Oregon. Rosanne and I had worked closely on the last couple of records and she needed a break from her willful and opinionated husband. We wrote some songs together, which I produced, and she wrote others on her own and recorded them with Tucker. The record will come out in October.

#### **What other projects are you working on currently?**

Rosanne and I have been writing songs for a Broadway musical based on the movie from the '70s titled *Norma Rae*. It's about the unionizing of textile factory workers in a Southern town. We got the call after *The River & the Thread* came out and was getting a lot of press. I think they thought of us because the story takes place in the South.

Rosanne and I also started doing a live project with Ry Cooder in May. It's a great band with guitars, bass, drums, and keyboards where Ry and Rosanne sing the songs. It has been a highlight of my career to work with Ry because he has been such a huge influence on me. I've also been writing songs with Shawn Colvin to see if we can come up with enough for an album. As well, I hope to finish my own solo record by the end of the year. **AC**

# T t





# Turn Up The Quiet

LEARN THE BLUESY FUNDAMENTALS  
OF ERIC CLAPTON'S ACOUSTIC STYLE

BY ADAM LEVY



With 26 million copies sold, Clapton's *Unplugged* is the best-selling live album.

**C**lose your eyes for a moment and imagine Eric Clapton playing guitar. You probably picture him cradling his iconic black Fender Stratocaster, or his Cream-era cherry-red Gibson ES-335, or maybe the sunburst Gibson Les Paul he played in the mid-1960s with John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers, right? Indeed, that's how people have tended to think of Clapton ever since he first hit the British blues-rock scene in the early 1960s as a member of the Yardbirds. So when Clapton's acoustic-driven *Unplugged* album was released in 1992, his prowess on *acoustic* guitar (a 1939 Martin 000-42 plus a few others) came as a big surprise to many music fans. This bold move was no lark, however. As the guitarist makes clear throughout *Unplugged*, he really doesn't need a solidbody electric or a cranked-up amplifier to express himself.

*Unplugged* was recorded live, in front of an audience, as part of MTV's acoustic-music television series. It went on to be Clapton's best-selling album and one of the all-time bestselling live albums by *any* artist. It features a laidback reboot of Clapton's iconic rocker "Layla" (see transcription on page 56), the ballad "Tears in Heaven," and several impassioned blues numbers, as well, including "Walkin' Blues" and "Rollin' and Tumblin'."

Clapton's flattop canon isn't limited to *Unplugged*. "How Long Blues," from his 1994 *From the Cradle* album, showcases his bottleneck skills on a wood-body resonator guitar. His 2004 tribute to Robert Johnson, *Me and Mr. Johnson*, has a few compelling non-electric tunes. ("Come On in My Kitchen" is a highlight.) "The Folks Who Live On the Hill," from the 2013 album *Old Sock*, is an understated charmer.

In this lesson, you'll learn some of Clapton's most intriguing acoustic moves—sophisticated chord shapes, rollicking rhythms, sinuous solo lines, and more. All the examples are meant to be played fingerstyle, as Clapton most often does when playing acoustic guitar. (Hybrid, or pick-and-fingers technique, is also viable.) The down-stemmed notes in the music are to be played with the thumb (or pick, in hybrid style). Play the up-stemmed notes with whichever available fingers you're most comfortable using. Clapton's picking-hand techniques aren't entirely consistent, and yours needn't be, either. Go for *feel* over orthodoxy.

### BOLD CHOICES

"Change the World," one of Clapton's most well-known acoustic songs, comes not from *Unplugged* but from the soundtrack to the 1996 film *Phenomenon*. (It was later included on the compilation *Clapton Chronicles: The Best of Eric Clapton*.) **Example 1a** is in the style of the



### Though it's his electric playing that earned him his 'godly' reputation, a whole lot can be learned by studying his quieter work.

slow-simmering intro from "Change the World." While E, F#m7, and G aren't difficult to play, take time to make sure that every note rings with Clapton-like clarity.

Play the G chord with your second finger on the sixth string (third fret). If you're playing fingerstyle, there's no need to fret notes on the fifth string or first, as you might do on a typical G chord, because those strings won't be sounded here. (If you find that your fifth string is resonating uncontrollably, try leaning the pad of your second finger lightly against the string to mute it. If the open first string is bothersome, stop it at the third fret.) On beat 3, add the note A on the third string (second fret) with your first finger. This extra note, by the way, momentarily amends the chord from G to Gadd9.

**Example 1b** is in the style of the verse sections from "Change the World." The chord

sequence in the first four measures is similar to the chords in Ex. 1, but here the atmosphere is more bluesy—owing to the E7 chord in measures 2 and 3, as well as the low open-E pedal tone that sustains below the shifting harmonies. The next four measures are similar to the first four, transposed up a perfect fourth to coincide with the harmonic shift, from I to IV. Now the pedal tone is played on the fifth string (open A).

**Examples 2a** and **2b** are styled after "Driftin'," from Clapton's 1994 album *From the Cradle*. (This is essentially the same song as "Driftin' Blues," released nearly 20 years earlier on the live album *E.C. Was Here*.) Clapton's "Driftin'" intro is the model for Ex. 2a. In the first two measures, the bass line (down-stemmed notes) rolls steadily along, establishing the song's groove. It may be helpful to practice the bass line on its own at first, adding the chordal jabs (up-stemmed notes) once you get the bass grooving. A triplet feel is introduced in measures 3 and 4. (This song was first recorded as "Drifting Blues" by Johnny Moore's Three Blazers in the 1940s. Clapton's triplet figures on his *From the Cradle* rendition may have been inspired, in





### Example 1a

♩ = 97

Example 1a musical notation showing a sequence of chords: E, F#m7, G, F#m7, and two endings: 1. E, 2. B7sus4. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a capo on the first fret.

### Example 1b

Example 1b musical notation showing a sequence of chords: E, A/E, E7, A/E, E, A7, D/A, A7, D/A, A7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a capo on the first fret.

### Example 2a

♩ = 100 (♩ = 3/4)

E7

Example 2a musical notation showing a sequence of chords: E7, A7, D/A, A7, D/A, A7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a capo on the first fret.

### Example 2b

E7

Example 2b musical notation showing a sequence of chords: E7, A7, D/A, A7, D/A, A7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a capo on the first fret.

## SILENT PARTNER

### Guitarist Andy Fairweather Low on Working with Eric Clapton

Over the past 40 years, Andy Fairweather Low has released several recordings of his own and has done some prominent sideman work, too, including tours and recordings with Roger Waters and with Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings. Still, Fairweather Low's extensive work with Clapton—beginning with *Unplugged*—may be his most notable calling card. —AL

#### Before *Unplugged*, had you played much acoustic guitar, or were you primarily an electric player?

At home or on the road, I was always playing acoustic guitar. I would spend all my waking hours working through Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop books and cassettes. My main focus was Mississippi John Hurt, a magical player and singer. To this day I'm still working on tunes by Blind Blake and Lonnie Johnson, absolute masters of the acoustic guitar.

#### Your acoustic parts on *Unplugged* are complementary to Clapton's, but not identical. Did you rehearse your parts to find effective ways to play together?

I spent a week with Eric at his house before we started recording *Unplugged*. He had asked me to work on one song, "Malted Milk," in advance, which I did. When we played the songs together, we just played. It was as simple as that.

#### Which instruments did you play on *Unplugged*?

I owned only one of the guitars that I played—a Spanish guitar, built by Manuel Contreras. The Martin that I played belonged to Eric. It was a 000-28 which had been converted to 45-style by Mike Longworth. In my mind, that was the best guitar Eric ever had. It was so rich, so deep, and fabulous to play. When it got sold [as part of Christie's Crossroads Guitar Auction, in 2004], I thought that was going to be it for me. I thought I'd be fired, but I wasn't. [Laughs.] I did get a 000-28 of my own after that, though.

My friend Alan Rogan lent me a Gibson archtop—a big beast of a guitar—which I played on "Layla." I played a D'Angelico mandolin on "Lonely Stranger" and "My Father's Eyes." It was so beautiful. I think whoever lent it thought that they were lending it to Eric, so I literally

slept with that thing to make sure that nothing ever happened to it. Oh, I did own one other thing—the harmonica, which I played on "San Francisco Bay Blues."

#### Are there any Clapton tracks that you're particularly proud of?

My favorite from *Unplugged* is "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out." Whenever we rehearsed it, I would always say to Eric, "Any chance we could play it again?" He'd ask me why, and I'd say, "Because I like it."

Outside of *Unplugged*, there's a few, but I'd say "I Want a Little Girl" [from *Reptile*]. If you're gonna do a Ray Charles song, you'd better be able to sing. Eric's a fantastic singer—a fact that's overlooked. [Organist] Billy Preston is on there. The Gaddmeister [drummer Steve Gadd] is on there, and [bassist] Nathan East. I might be on there, too. Yeah, wow. It's a fabulous memory. I'm a very lucky man.

part, by the piano playing of Three Blazers pianist Charles Brown.)

Ex. 2b is not unlike Clapton's instrumental break around the midpoint of his recording. Measures 1–3 are straightforward, with the shuffling triplet feel continuing. The triplet on beat 4 of measure 1 has an open E where you likely wouldn't expect it—between two higher A notes on the second string. (This three-note figure is seen again on beat 2 of measure 4.) The 6/4 meter in measures 8 and 12 may look tricky, but these measures should feel natural when played in context. Bar 9 features an oddball B11 voicing, with the chord's 3rd (D#) on string 4, and the chord's 11th (E) on string 1. Sounding the 11th an octave above the third is a bold choice. Then again, the blues is a bold musical form.

## BRAZILIAN AND JAZZ STRAINS

Clapton played a nylon-string guitar built by Spanish luthier José Ramirez III on "Signe"—*Unplugged*'s breezy, Brazilian-tinged opening number. **Example 3a** is akin to the intro and first section from "Signe." (It may not be entirely accurate to call this instrumental's first section a "verse," though it functions as such.) The bass notes are played with the thumb and should always land squarely on the beat, while melodic elements, played with two or three fingers, are sometimes anticipatory. This asymmetrical phrasing gives the music some push and pull. The indicated slurs are essential to nailing the feel, as well. **Example 3b** is in the spirit of the second, chorus-like section. Again, take care to get the syncopations and slurs just right.

As part of the live performance that became the *Unplugged* album, Clapton recorded the wonderful ballad "Circus Left Town." For whatever reason, this song was not originally included on the album, but it's on the deluxe edition, released in 2013; a revamped version, simply called "Circus," appears on Clapton's 1998 album *Pilgrim*. **Example 4** is based on the intro from the *Unplugged* recording. The fingerpicking pattern in this example is a spin on Travis-style picking. Bass notes alternate on strings 5 and 4, which isn't uncommon, but thanks to the atypical chord shapes, the bass notes aren't always the root and fifth of the chord.

The Amaj7 in measures 1 and 2 is played unusually—with A on the open fifth string, G# on the fourth string at the sixth fret, and C# on the third string at the sixth fret. The note B is played on the open second string, then hammered up to E at the fifth fret. Use a half barre across strings 1–4 (or a partial barre across strings 2–4 if you can) at fret 4 to make the Badd9/A chord. Similarly, Adim7 may be played as a half or partial







Cont. from p. 19

**A7**

**E7** **B11/F#**

**A7** **E7**

### Example 3a

$\text{♩} = 89$

**A** **B/A** **E/G#** **F#** **Bm** **E**

*let ring throughout*

### Example 3b

**A** **D<sub>sus2</sub>/F#** **E<sub>7sus4</sub>** **E7**

barre, or with individual fingers on the notes F#, C, and D#. You could also try playing the root note (A) of Adim7 with your second finger on string 6, third finger on string 3, and your first finger barring strings 2–4. On the *Unplugged* video footage, it appears that Clapton plays it this way, while his backing guitarist, Andy Fairweather Low, plays the low A as an open string.

### BLUES REPRISE

**Example 5**, this lesson's final figure, is a return to the blues. It's based on Clapton's *Unplugged* cover of Big Bill Broonzy's "Hey Hey," first recorded in the early 1950s. Looking at Ex. 5 on the page, you'll see that the chords outline a fairly typical 12-bar blues form. When you dig in and play it, however, you'll discover a few unusual moves for both your fretting and picking hands.

After the sliding pickup note, you'll briefly play an E7#9 chord on beat 2 of measure 1. The notes you'll sound on beat 3 only use open strings, but you should keep holding down the remainder of the chord shape (on strings 5, 4,

and 3) so you don't inadvertently strum those strings as open. That said, Broonzy's style—the model for Clapton's "Hey Hey"—is hard-driving. The picking-hand thumb sometimes brushes strings 6 and 5, regardless of whether the chord at that point is E7 or A7. In measure 9, the B7 chord gets a similar treatment, with the thumb grazing strings 5 and 4. To tame the bass notes throughout, gently mute them with the base of your picking-hand palm.

In measures 2 and 4, you'll play an A7 shape on the first three strings. There's no A in this chord voicing, so it could alternately be considered an E7#9 with the chord's 13th (C#) added on top. However you think of it, it's a pretty tangy chord. The A7 played in measures 5, 6, and 10 is a more common form. The final turnaround in measures 11 and 12 is based around the standard first-position E chord.

As you've seen in this lesson, Clapton is an agile acoustic guitarist with plenty of surprising moves up his sleeve. Though it was his electric playing that earned him his "godly" reputation, a whole lot can be learned by studying his

Me and Mr. Johnson



quieter work. *Unplugged* is obviously the prime source to tap, though remarkable acoustic performances can be found across his vast oeuvre. By investing some listening and practice time with this music, you'll not only get a few of Clapton's moves under your fingers—you'll be learning from some of the earlier players whose work he has studied so scrupulously. **AC**



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# Example 4

$\text{♩} = 100$

A<sup>+</sup>7

B<sup>+</sup>9/A

A<sup>+</sup>dim7

C<sup>+</sup>7

B

# Example 5

$\text{♩} = 58$

E<sup>+</sup>7#9

A<sup>+</sup>7/E

E<sup>+</sup>7#9

A<sup>+</sup>7/E

A<sup>+</sup>7

E<sup>+</sup>7#9

A<sup>+</sup>7/E

B<sup>+</sup>7

A<sup>+</sup>7

E







**BLUES  
POWER!**

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**RORY  
BLOCK**

**SLIDES INTO A NEW  
TRIBUTE SERIES**

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**BY BLAIR JACKSON**

**G**uitarist, singer, and songwriter Rory Block has been one of the country's preeminent blues artists for more than four decades and close to 30 albums now, but if you haven't checked in with her in the past dozen years, you've missed out on some of the best music she's ever made. It was in 2006 that Block made her extraordinarily soulful *The Lady and Mr. Johnson* tribute to Robert Johnson, and she followed that triumph with a remarkable succession of six discs in what she calls her Mentor Series—each devoted to a different legendary blues personality she encountered and learned from when she was first coming up as a musician in Greenwich Village in the mid to late 1960s: Son House, Fred McDowell, Rev. Gary Davis, John Hurt, Skip James, and Bukka White; quite a group. Each of those albums manages to capture the essence and originality of the featured bluesman, while also showcasing Block's formidable skills on slide and finger-style acoustic guitar, and her underrated talent as a passionate and versatile singer.

Now Block has turned her attention to a new series, *Power Women of the Blues*, "a project that has been simmering in my imagination for 54 years," she writes in the liner notes to her exceptional 2018 album, *A Woman's Soul: A Tribute to Bessie Smith*. Over the course of ten tracks, which range from such chestnuts as "Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer," "Weeping Willow Blues," and "Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl" to

less-known numbers like "On Revival Day" and "Empty Bed Blues," Block dives head first into the wide range of styles tackled by the "Empress of the Blues" in the 1920s and '30s—from deep blues to slinky, ribald excursions, to jazzier numbers. Block's singing has never been better, and it goes without saying that the guitar playing is scorching when needed, delicate if called for. Block has few peers when it comes to acoustic blues, and with the able assistance of Rob Davis—her husband, co-producer and engineer—she's learned to layer her "solo" albums with multiple parts, giving her projects a richness and complexity that is at times astounding, and always supremely tasteful.

I reached Block by phone at her home in upstate New York this past summer and talked a bit about playing slide, the new album, and, naturally, the gorgeous Martin signature model guitars that are all over her albums.

**You came to slide relatively late in terms of your overall development as a guitarist. I'd like to hear how you got into it and who the models were for you.**

The first slide player who blew me away was Robert Johnson. His playing sounded so clean I just couldn't see how it was possible that he was using a slide. In 1964, some of my friends were starting to play slide, but to me the sound was very different from Robert Johnson. So I made the decision to play Robert Johnson's music with my

bare fingers. I did that for years, until at some point it began to dawn on me that I had to embrace the slide, because it was such a central part of the music I loved—whether Son House, Bukka White, Robert Johnson, and others—and I knew I really had to learn the style. Stefan Grossman and his friends used to break a wine bottle, sand down the sharp edges—thus the term

"bottleneck." I searched for years but could never find anything small enough to fit my finger. At some point, the word got out and people started bringing me custom-made slides. I developed a wonderful collection of blown glass, short and long, porcelain in many colors, brass . . . all beautiful, but somehow none of them fit me.

Eventually John Hammond said, "Go out and get yourself a socket wrench; they come in all sizes." That was the best advice anyone ever gave me. So I went down to a friend's gas station and picked out a 14-millimeter deep-well socket. They sanded the knob end off for me, and I used it on my ring finger, from the second knuckle down. I later realized that I do

this because of the way Fred McDowell played when I knew him. He had a tiny piece of metal on the end of one knuckle, but the music he made with that tiny slide was huge.

So I started experimenting with my socket wrench, but I really could not get it at all. I was overshooting the frets, playing too fast, the vibrato was too tense, and the whole thing was perpetually buzzy. It wasn't until Bonnie Raitt played on one of my albums and we were mixing—we had her soloed in the speakers, and there it was, plain as day: It was *relaxed*. She was taking a stroll up the neck. She would hesitate for a split second and then she would start to rock, slow and funky. "Oh," I said. "I'm doing it all wrong! It's relaxed!" That's when I finally started to make some headway, but not before rethinking the whole thing. Still, I had to work crazy hard on it before I found "the pocket." Sometimes it takes its time before it gels, before it starts to come together. But when you find it, slide is pure joy. My husband says I play slide just like it's a vocal.

**When did slides start to become commercially available?**

If you go back a few decades, there were never slides in stores. I'm just glad that today slides come in all sizes, so anyone can go out and buy one in their own size. Back in the day you had to make your own; you had to be creative like Fred McDowell, who notably once used a marrow bone. In those days, people got ahold of anything that made a cool sound on the strings—jackknives, bones, pieces of metal. So I don't really remember what year it was, but eventually slides began to appear. At first they were all huge, made for a large hand, and once again I couldn't find anything that worked for me. That's where the socket wrench came in—and add to that some severe struggling on my part.

**Besides the old blues guys, were there more modern players who influenced your slide playing?**

In addition to Bonnie Raitt, I always loved Ry Cooder's playing. As far as I was concerned, that was the sound to emulate when I first heard him in the mid-'70s. Ellen McIlwaine was out there playing killer slide back in the day—back when it was a really unusual sound and it hadn't yet become all the rage. Then along came Kelly Joe Phelps. Now there are a great number of super-talented slide players. Slide is truly an art form unto itself.

**Were you applying too much pressure, digging in too hard?**

I don't know how to describe it except to say that I just had the wrong touch. Slide is like a tennis

**'SLIDE IS LIKE A TENNIS BACKHAND—AT FIRST IT DOESN'T WORK, DOESN'T WORK; THEN SUDDENLY YOU FIND THE SWEET SPOT'**





backhand—at first it doesn't work, doesn't work; then suddenly you find the sweet spot. After the moment of revelation I had listening to Bonnie, I realized that it was not so much about obsessing over pitch, but that the pitch finds itself when you relax. If you overthink it, it gets stiff. When you relax and let it get intuitive, it gets really funky. It has a kind of wobble to it that's really beautiful. And it isn't so much about pressure—hard, soft—it's just a *feel*.

When I'm teaching, I tell my students that you can go up with the slide, or you can go down. I learned that from Brendan Croker, who played with Mark Knopfler [of Dire Straits], in a band they put together called the Notting Hillbillies. Brendan was touring in the US and just happened to have a gig in my town. We managed to find some time for him to come over and sit in on one of my songs. As I watched him, I saw that he was going up the neck *and* down. That hadn't occurred to me until then. It always seemed like slide was meant to go *up* the neck. I'd seen people do what he did before, but I hadn't really focused on it until I started playing a lot of slide myself. Brendan's playing made me realize that slide was even more versatile than I thought.

At that point, I went back and listened to Son House again, and I realized you didn't have to slide across the strings—you could leap over the strings and use the slide as a fretting device. You could lift up and come down on all these different notes and pick out a melody. You could even leap off the string to create a sound like a little exclamation point. Bonnie is great at doing that.

#### **How has having the slide above the joint informed your style, or affected what you can do with it?**

A lot of slide players go for the fully covered finger. For me, partially covered and bent at the knuckle is about flexibility. That's not to say anyone is *less* flexible with a larger slide, it's just that we all figure out the way we want to do it, and what feels best for us. So I like the feeling of being able to bend my finger. It also allows me to fret with my other fingers in a comfortable way.

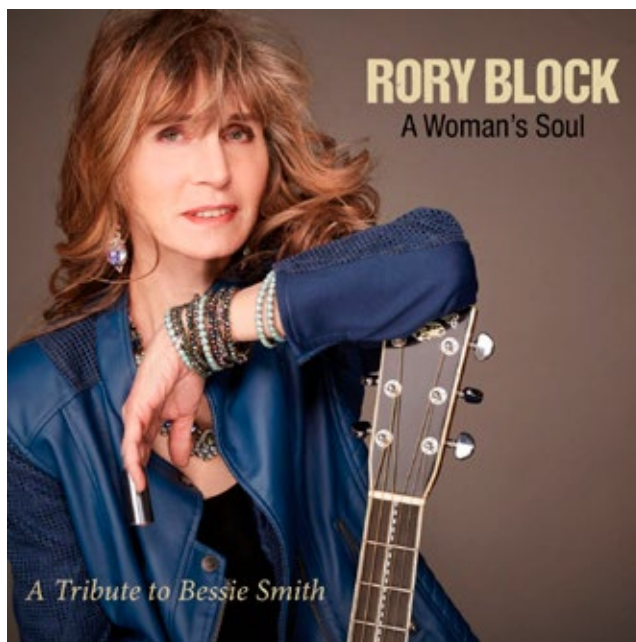
#### **Did getting into slide open your eyes to other tunings?**

No, no, I grew up with open tunings. It was all about open G, open D, and partially open tunings like dropped D. Open G and dropped D

were my two favorite tunings for years, dropped D being a typical country blues tuning used for "Big Road Blues," "Canned Heat," and so many others. The E string turned down to low D is an iconic, beautiful country blues sound. "Frankie and Albert" and all sorts of other songs are in open G. I was spending most of my time in open tunings right out of the gate, so it was just about switching over what I was already doing to incorporate slide.

#### **The parts on the new album are nicely layered, with multiple guitars, some percussion, and bass, all of which you played. Can you talk about that process?**

When recording multiple tracks most people



use some sort of mechanized click-track. It gives everyone something to play to, keeps the tempo steady, and is perfect for overdubs. But it's also possible to have it make things sound and feel a bit robotic. Somewhere along the line, I decided to try creating my own hand-played click-track. The idea was to give the whole thing more of a human feel. A live performance is always going to breathe more, fluctuate, and go a little faster here, a little slower there. So I decided to create all my own rhythms for an entire album—starting with the hand-played click-track and adding things like percussion played with cooking utensils on storage boxes and tubs, things you'd find in a kitchen, attic, cellar, or even a barn. Anything that sounds good works just fine. I assembled all these different boxes and whacking devices. I used plastic, metal, and wooden spoons, as well as my hand hitting the guitar—I call that

"guitar bongos." I started by tapping along to Bessie Smith's track to get a tempo, then Rob [Davis] would mute the track and I'd just keep playing. I think we ended up with rhythm tracks with a human feel. Almost all the tracks have some little irregularity or complexity to them, but that's the sound I wanted.

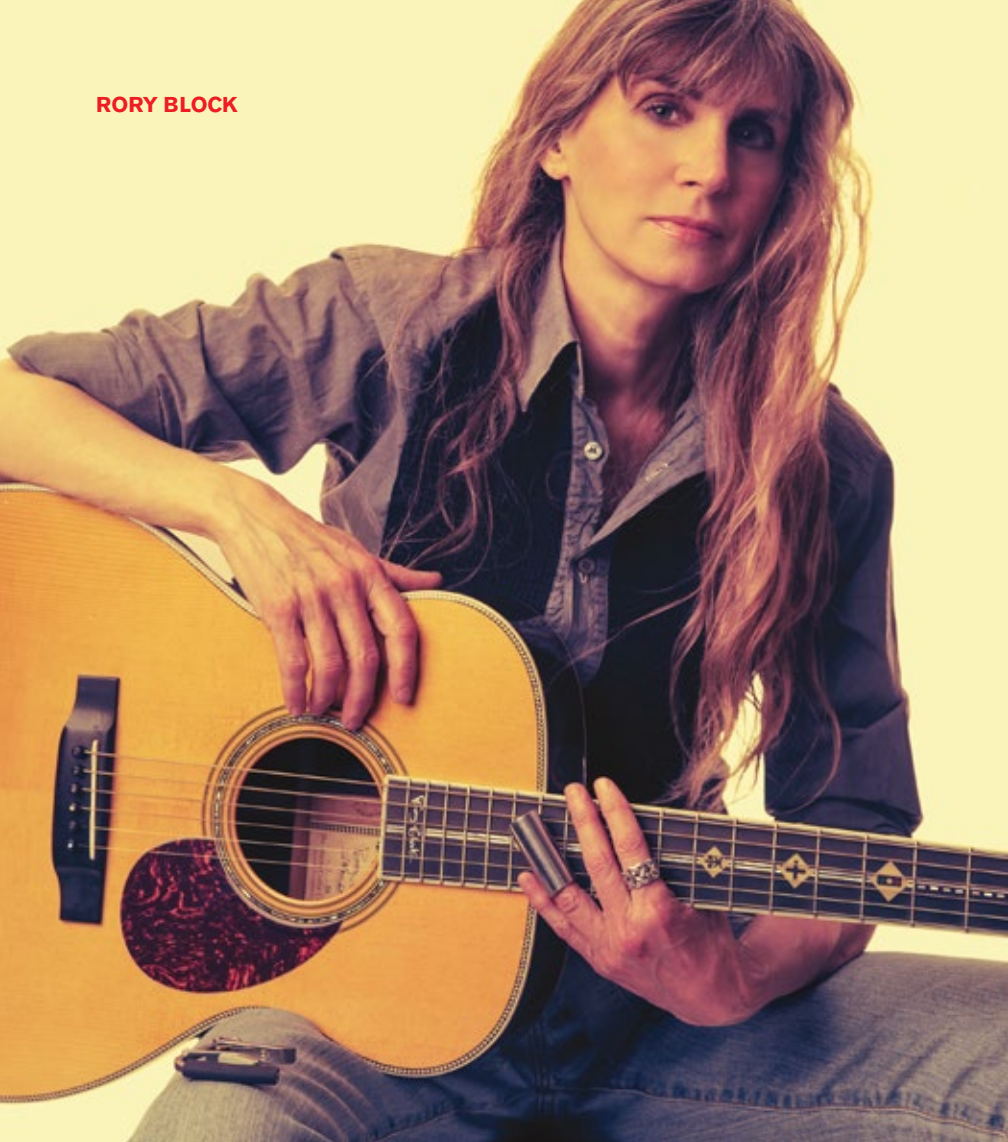
Then I recorded the root guitars, most of which were in regular tuning. Then I'd build from there, and that's where things got really fun. Overdubs in different tunings—I'd mess around until I heard something I liked, and maybe create a new tuning or two for interest.

After that, I began adding bass parts, and for those I simply tuned the guitar way below pitch. For the first song, "Do Your Duty," I listened to the bass player on the original recording, who played such a brilliant part—I thought, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" The original part was that good. But soon after that, I began to just play whatever came to me, and that started to work also. By the time I got to the third or fourth song, it was like I was just playing bass—getting the vibe and creating my own parts, inspired, of course, by Bessie's outrageous band. I began tuning down into completely unknown open tunings. Sometimes it was just the three lower strings—the E, the A, and D—and I'd tune them way down. Then the last thing I added was slide, and that was the icing on the cake—and always totally spontaneous.

When I walk into the studio, I want to get right to it, so Rob has to have everything ready to record the minute I walk in. I'm getting ideas and trying things out as I'm tuning up, and I don't want to miss anything. I'm not as good the second time around, I'm not good at repetition. I'm not one of those "OK, take 30!" types. I work quickly and I want to get it down "on tape." Rob's got to be recording as soon as I put the headphones on.

**Obviously, a difference between this album and your Mentor Series is that all of those guys were guitarists, so that gave you something to work off in terms of your musical choices. Here, you're playing off a singer and different kinds of arrangements, sometimes dominated by horns instead of guitars.**

That's right. When I was doing Son House and Robert Johnson, I was definitely following their arrangements; that was the whole point! Crack the code and honor the original. Then, from the Fred McDowell album on, I was



Block with her Martin OM-40 Rory Block signature model, one of 38 made in 2004.

SERGIO KURHAJEC

mostly playing my own lines. In this case, I am using the guitar as the building blocks for the entire track, not based on another guitar part but on an entire band arrangement. At first, I started by using the horns in Bessie's band as the main inspiration. Those horns are beyond amazing!

#### Let's talk about your signature model Martin. How did that come about?

In the '60s, when Stefan Grossman and I crossed the country together, he would walk into pawnshops and come out with these unbelievable prewar Martin guitars that nobody seemed to value at the time. The owners must have just seen them as old instruments covered in dust that needed a lot of repairs; clearly they weren't thought to be super-valuable at the time. Some of the guitars Stefan found needed a neck reset, some a bridge that needed to be glued, and he'd often pay as little as 50 bucks for some herringbone- or pearl-inlay Martin that for some reason someone had pawned. He fixed them all up, and for a long while, I was playing his guitars exclusively, because I didn't have one of my own at the time. I had

an old Galiano that my parents gave me when I was eight years old, but it was set up for nylon strings, and soon I had begun to play only on steel strings.

Over the years I was given a number of guitars by various companies and builders, but I never felt completely happy until I got my own Martin. One day, out of the blue, Martin called me and asked me if I wanted to pick out a guitar. This was a landmark moment in my life, a dream come true. The first one they gave me was an OM-28V, which was the closest thing to what Stefan used to have, because I knew my hands were comfortable with it. I used it exclusively for a time, and loved it to death. Then they called me up again and said they'd like to do a signature model. I couldn't believe it; this time I had died and gone to heaven! So [Martin archivist] Dick Boak, Rob, and I went to a restaurant and drew design ideas on dinner napkins until we decided that the neck would be a blacktop highway, which I reasoned was an iconic,

bluesy theme—complete with highway signs: stop, yield, and a railroad crossing—and Dick, who is a great designer as well as a builder, came up with the idea for a [1930s Hudson] Terraplane on the headstock, to honor Robert Johnson's "Terraplane Blues." I specifically wanted to pick a body size that was generic—not designed for one body size or another, but a universal size that would fit everyone—so that's what we chose, and my pride and joy, my Signature Model OM-40, was born. There were four prototypes to begin with, and then they made 38 signed guitars, and all sold out. At one point, I parted with one of them—and it was traumatic; of course, I miss it. But I got some comfort knowing that it went to a great home. I have three left and I'm not going to sell any of them. One I think of as a ballad guitar and another is a sort of all-purpose guitar that can take slide and more strident playing. I've had a lot of people ask me when I'm going to do another signature model, and it's certainly something to think about.

#### What has age given you as a player and a singer?

You mature, you learn, and you get more experienced. I feel much more free and confident now, and I can say that I have expanded my range. I've broken my own rules and created new boundaries. Nonetheless, most of my foundational learning took place between the ages of 14 and 16 years old. That's when I learned all the different styles of the artists I'm now doing tributes to. I'd say the biggest change now is that I play slide, and next that I've become a songwriter. I think that all the years, all the gigs, all the tours, and all the experiences in life have contributed to a kind of new version of myself—which I frankly feel

**'ONE DAY, OUT OF THE BLUE, MARTIN CALLED ME AND ASKED ME IF I WANTED TO PICK OUT A GUITAR.'**

is reflected in my music, particularly in my guitar playing. I think that happens to all of us in our own areas. We bring everything we have to what we do and it becomes a new piece of fabric, a growing piece of artwork, with new brush strokes and new layers constantly being added. This process never stops, and that's a good thing, too, so things never get boring.

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THE 2018

# ACOUSTIC GUITAR

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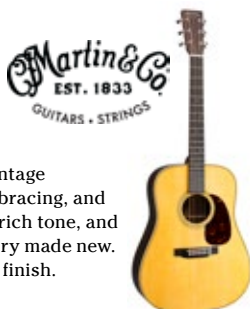
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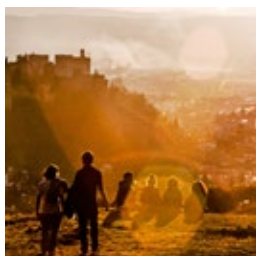
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# Next-Gen



BROOKS  
ROBERTSON

GWENIFER  
RAYMOND

SARAH LOUISE  
HENSON



**A**coustic fingerstyle guitar tends to be viewed by outsiders as a sound and style steeped in, if not slavishly devoted to, traditional idioms like blues, folk, and old-timey music. But there have always been artists who have used the form to explore new and exciting territories, be it Pentangle's progressive folk, John Fahey's American Primitive stylings, or Michael Hedges' extended technique experimentations.

Today, a new crop of players continues to push fingerstyle guitar toward the future while celebrating the sounds of the past. The five artists showcased here—Christie Lenée, Brooks Robertson, Daniel Bachman, Sarah Louise, and Gwenifer Raymond—exemplify some of the rising stars in the world of fingerstyle guitar. But

even as they gravitate toward different areas of the acoustic music spectrum, they share a similar adventurous, exploratory spirit when it comes to their instrument. *Acoustic Guitar* asked each of them to discuss their approach to fingerstyle music, the guitars and gear they use, and their tips for honing their craft—or yours.

## CHRISTIE LENÉE

Christie Lenée had been studying classical and jazz guitar for four years when, as a senior in high school, she attended a Dave Matthews Band concert. "That was the moment I decided I wanted to be a songwriter," she says, "so it was interesting to start with a lot of advanced classical music and then go backwards and learn how to sing and play Dave Matthews songs—which was actually more challenging than some of those classical pieces."

The blending of acoustic-based singer-songwriter fare with more technique-heavy instrumental guitar music is still at the heart of what Lenée does. On *Chasing Infinity*, her 2013 instrumental album, Lenée—winner of last year's prestigious International Fingerstyle Guitar Championship—showcased her extraordinary classical-rooted fingerstyle playing augmented by extended techniques like overhand tapping and percussive slapping of her guitar's body. "I heard Michael Hedges and it made that connection for me of how an ensemble or more symphonic type of orchestral arrangement could be put into an acoustic guitar," she says.

At the same time, Lenée's most recent release, *Stay* (which also features DMB guitarist Tim Reynolds), is a more folk-pop-influenced affair that puts her vocals and lyrics front and center. Currently, she is making more of a point to bring the two sides of her guitar personality

**BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK**





LUKE BATEMAN



DANIEL  
BACHMAN



CHRISTIE  
LENÉE



ALISON HASBACH

# FINGERSTYLE

together in her music. “I’ve been trying to write simple songs,” she says, “but also find those moments to put in what I guess you could call ‘ear candy,’ for the guitar fans.”

That ear candy, it would seem, is there to please Lenée, as well. “Yeah, that’s true,” she admits. “I need to soothe that part of my soul that loves this crazy guitar stuff.”

## PLAYING TIP

Rather than discussing various techniques or practice regimens, Lenée offers a broader point about playing music: “Follow your heart and play the music that you love,” she says. It was while teaching a workshop at the George School in Pennsylvania that she realized how rare this is. “There were 600 students there, and I asked them, ‘How many people in here love music?’ Everybody raised their hands. Then I asked, ‘How many people in here play music?’

Everybody raised their hands. Finally, I asked, ‘How many people in here play the music that they love?’ Shockingly, about a third of the people raised their hands.

“That really set off a lightbulb in my head,” she continues. “Musicians get so caught up in their studies that they forget why they’re studying in the first place. So the best tip I can give to anybody is follow your heart and use your ears. And keep listening. The more we listen, the more we can tap into our own voice. And I don’t mean our physical voice—I mean the voice of our own self-expression.”

Lenée demonstrated how she has tapped into her voice when she visited AG’s studios recently and played her composition “Breath of Spring,” excerpted in **Example 1**. At the heart of the piece is the seven-note ostinato (repeating pattern) that appears throughout in the up-stemmed layer of music. Lenée plays the ostinato

entirely with hammer-ons and pull-offs. At the same time, she does a bit of two-handed tapping with her picking fingers (down-stemmed notes). In the interest of efficiency, keep your fingers close to the strings; if need be, learn each hand’s part separately before combining them.

## WHAT SHE PLAYS

Maton 808 (main live acoustic), Martin D12-35 50th Anniversary, Veillette Gryphon Soprano 12-string, Veillette Baritone 12-string, Martin J-40, Martin D-18 Golden Era, Gretsch White Falcon, Luna Artist Series, Luna 8-string ukulele. Amplifier: AER Acoustic. Effects: Boss Chromatic Tuner, MXR 10 Band EQ, Boss DD-20 Giga Delay, Eventide H9, TC Helicon Harmony Singer, Boss RC-30 Loop Station. Other gear: KOPF Percussion “Toe Kicker” stomptbox, the Engle (drumstick for guitar; used on selective pieces), Radial Tonebone PZ-Pre preamp. Strings: Martin SP 92/8 Phosphor

Bronze Medium (SP Phosphor Bronze Light on 12-string guitars) Picks: “I rarely use them, but if so, I like the 1.0mm size. More often, I like to angle my hand and just use the front/back of the nail of my index finger. The nails have a glued tip with acrylic gel powder and are filled in every two weeks or so.”

## BROOKS ROBERTSON

Brooks Robertson was just 11 years old when his father brought him to the Nokie Edwards Festival near his hometown of Eugene, Oregon. There, he witnessed a performance from fingerstyle legend Buster B. Jones (nicknamed “Le Machine Gun”) that changed his life forever. “After the first few songs in his set I turned to my father and exclaimed, ‘Dad, I want to do that!’” Robertson recalls.

Not only did Robertson start playing guitar soon after that day, but through a

fortuitous turn of events, Jones also became his guitar teacher—and within six months, the two were performing on stages together. As for how the young Robertson progressed so quickly: “I had an inextinguishable desire to play like my new mentor and was essentially a malleable blank canvas,” he explains. “I had a hunger to learn all I could.”

Robertson learned a lot—and quickly. A fingerstyle prodigy, he performed on Garrison Keillor’s *A Prairie Home Companion* at 14 and took first prize in the 12-to-20-year-old talent competition. He recorded his first album, 2006’s *Thumb Like It Hot*, when he was just 17, and has since released two more solo efforts, as well as a pair of albums in a duo format with fingerstyle champion John Standefer.

Robertson’s fingerpicking is characterized by the same sort of dynamic, percussive rhythms as those of Jones, but it’s also informed by artists ranging from Chet Atkins and Jerry Reed to Tommy Emmanuel and Lenny Breau to Michael Hedges and Antonio Carlos Jobim. “I think of my style as a melting pot of instrumental Americana, country, bluegrass, blues, jazz, and folk,” he says. And just as Jones took him under his wing, Robertson, now 28, instructs others in masterclasses and workshops all over the world

(including at Tommy Emmanuel’s Guitar Camp and the Chet Atkins Appreciation Society Convention), as well as offering his own courses through [truefire.com](http://truefire.com) and [fingerpickinglessons.com](http://fingerpickinglessons.com).

## PLAYING TIP

When it comes to playing fingerstyle guitar, Robertson says that maintaining great technique is essential. “Spending time working on thumb and finger control, strength, and independence can allow you to have command of any digit—which directly impacts volume, tone, dynamics, speed and accuracy,” he explains. “Strive to develop agility and fluidity with each finger so that each digit is as developed as the next. Working to improve right-hand technique, whether it be through playing tunes or doing exercises, has never failed to elevate my fingerstyle skills.”

An excellent way of building that technique is to include a variety of banjo rolls in your practice regimen. Robertson demonstrates some basic forward and backward rolls in **Example 2**. Practice them as written, with your thumb, index, and middle fingers picking three-note groupings. Learn them with other finger combinations, as well—thumb, middle, and ring fingers, for instance—and plug these patterns into your own favorite chords and progressions.

**‘You can take traditional motifs and themes that are old as hell and make them brand new.’**

—DANIEL BACHMAN

## Example 1

Christie Lenée

Tuning: D A D F# A D

**D** **F#5 G5**

\*+ = tapped note

**D**





## WHAT HE PLAYS

Collings OM2H, Kirk Sand Brooks Robertson Model nylon-string, Gibson ES-125. Strings: Elixir (acoustic steel-string and archtop), high-tension nylon strings (classical). Thumbpick: Fred Kelly Slick Pick (Heavy). Amplification: AER Compact 60/3 through a TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb and an L.R. Baggs Venue DI.

## DANIEL BACHMAN

As a teenager, Daniel Bachman was heavily influenced by American Primitive guitarists

like John Fahey and Robbie Basho. But it was another artist playing in this style, Jack Rose, who proved to be his biggest inspiration. This was as much due to Rose's playing—"He was in avant-garde music scenes but was also a really good guitar picker, doing country blues, Piedmont stuff, that whole vibe"—as for the fact that Bachman, like Rose before him, hails from the town of Fredericksburg, Virginia. "He was a guy that was around that I could actually watch," Bachman says. "That meant a lot to me."

In fact, Bachman's surroundings inform his music to a great degree. His rigorous, long-format instrumentals are steeped in the American Primitive style, but they also incorporate elements of "other rich traditions from this area, like hillbilly, blues, and gospel, as well as all the crazy early American stuff that's part of the makeup of this area," he says.

On first glance, Bachman's sound and sensibility might seem to be merely a throwback—indeed, he is currently working on whittling down his three-finger technique to a two-finger

### Example 2 Brooks Robertson

The musical notation for Example 2, Brooks Robertson, is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a guitar staff with a capo on the first fret. The guitar staff includes fret numbers and fingerings. The first system is marked with a 'G' chord and includes the text 'p i m etc.' and 'p i m'. The second system is marked with 'G' and 'C' chords and includes 'p i m'. The third system is marked with 'D7' and 'G' chords and includes 'p i m'. The fourth system is marked with 'G' and 'G' chords and includes 'm i p'.

approach, inspired in part by Virgil Anderson, “a banjo player from the Cumberland plateau who is bad to the bone,” he says. But the 28-year-old is hardly just recreating a bygone era. He has a background in noise and avant-garde music, and points to everything from hip-hop to hardcore country to electronic music pioneer Laurie Spiegel as inspiration.

“You can take traditional motifs and themes that are old as hell and make them brand new,” Bachman says about his approach. “Or try to, at least. That’s always part of the challenge.”

## PLAYING TIP

In order to be a good player, Bachman says, you should be a good listener. “You have to have a couple-year period where you’re completely obsessed with music and you just listen to it all the time. You can’t be a good performer, composer, or guitar player in general if you’re not an active listener. I’d honestly say that, at least at

first, you should listen to the music you want to play more than you should actually try to play it. That way it just gets in your head.”

When you do start playing it, he continues, you should be similarly obsessed. “For about three years I played guitar at least two or three hours every day. When it came to something like learning a picking pattern, I would sit and just play it over and over again until it was drilled into my head and I could do it up and down, fast and slow, two-finger and three-finger. It sounds so stupid and obvious, but that’s the key. You just have to do it all the time, because you’re not going to get anywhere with the guitar unless you absolutely love it.”

Lately, Bachman has been enjoying playing lap slide, and **Example 3** gives a sampling of what he plays in open-G tuning on the accompanying video on AG’s website. Notice how the slides and rolled chords (indicated in notation with squiggly vertical lines) add liveliness and expression to the performance. Don’t worry about playing things exactly as written; instead, experiment with your own articulations and embellishments.

## WHAT HE PLAYS

Bachman’s two main guitars are a 1971 Martin D-18 and a reproduction Weissenborn “that I

got from Gruhn Guitars in Nashville, and no one knows who made it—it’s a complete mystery guitar.” Other instruments include an early-’70s Gibson J-45, an early-’80s Guild D-55, and a vintage Stella banjo. Strings: D’Addario (“I use medium gauge 13s on the D-18 and Resophonic 16s on the Weissenborn.”) Fingerpicks: Dunlop brass. Thumbpick: Dunlop plastic. Slide: Stevens Steel Bar.

## SARAH LOUISE HENSON

On her third solo album, *Deeper Woods*, Sarah Louise Henson (who performs and records under the name Sarah Louise) takes much inspiration from her natural surroundings. But even with songs named after local flora (“Bowman’s Root”) and fauna (“Pipevine Swallowtails”), Henson, who lives in rural North Carolina near the Appalachian Trail, stresses it would be a mistake to pigeonhole her as some sort of woodland fairy.

“People could make assumptions that I’m this shut-in who translates the whispers of leaves into guitar notes, which is just not true,” she says with a laugh. “But I do have old roots in this area.”

Those roots come through in her music, which incorporates elements of everything from

## ‘Sit and watch Netflix while your thumb goes off and does its own thing.’

—GWENIFER RAYMOND

### Example 3

Daniel Bachman

\*Tuning: D G D G B D

Example 3 musical notation for Daniel Bachman, showing a sequence of chords (G, G6, Gmaj7, G6) and a fretboard diagram with fingerings (0, 2, 4, 5, 14, 2) and a note labeled "with bottleneck".

\*Tune slightly flat to match video.

Example 3 musical notation for Daniel Bachman, showing a sequence of chords (G, D, G, G6) and a fretboard diagram with fingerings (12, 12, 5-7, 7, 7, 7, 0, 2) and a note labeled "etc.".





Appalachian folk, American Primitive, and prewar blues, to drone, minimalism, and traditional balladry into meticulous, spiraling 12-string solo guitar arrangements. And she weaves it all together using her own idiosyncratic picking patterns and alternate tunings.

"I've always made up my own tunings when it comes to writing," Henson explains. "I'm after a particular sound, something I hear in my mind, and the tuning is a vehicle for that. I change it however I need to in order to get to what I want to hear."

Henson's first two solo recordings, 2015's *Field Guide* and 2016's *VDSQ Acoustic Series Volume 12*, were centered almost exclusively on her entrancing acoustic playing. For *Deeper Woods*, she added in her own singing, as well as snatches of synthesizer, recorder, drums, distorted electric guitar, and other instrumentation. The sound, she says, "was something I had been working up to for so long."

At the same time, she also plays alongside multi-instrumentalist Sally Ann Morgan in House and Land, a duo that blends traditional folk music with more modern compositional elements. "If we start to restrict or embalm folk music, it's no longer folk music," Henson reasons. "It's just people kind of acting out this idea of folk music. So you have to think of it as a living, breathing thing."

#### PLAYING TIP

Henson likes to create unique picking patterns by combining two or more patterns into a "bigger, more complex one." To do this, she suggests starting with two patterns in different time signatures—"like, 1 2 3 would be in three [3/8], and 1 2 3 4 would be in four [4/8]"—and practicing them slowly. "When you feel confident, combine them and start increasing the speed," she says. "After a while, it becomes its own pattern. And I can't overemphasize that there are infinite possibilities for variation. Don't be afraid!"

In **Example 4**, Louise demonstrates the concept on a 12-string guitar in one of those tunings of her own invention—D<sub>5</sub> G<sub>5</sub> D<sub>5</sub> A<sub>5</sub> C<sub>5</sub> D<sub>5</sub>. But the tuning and the fretting fingers are less important than the rhythmic and picking patterns. "It will work well with any chord that uses those strings," Henson says. "I would also encourage people to make up their own tunings."

#### WHAT SHE PLAYS

Taylor 356e 12-string, 1972 Guild F-212 12-string, 1986 Alvarez-Yairi 12-string, early 2000s Mexican-made Fender Stratocaster, 1990s Danelectro 12-string. Amplification: 1960s Airline, 1970s "chopped" Fender Super

Six Reverb. Pedals: Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, Dunlop Cry Baby.

#### GWENIFER RAYMOND

Gwenifer Raymond's hauntingly mesmeric finger-style compositions are influenced by distinctly American artists like Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, Roscoe Holcomb, and John Fahey—unusual source material given that she was born and raised in the small Welsh village of Taff's Well. Similarly unusual, Raymond, who is 32, came to this music through a unique entry point: Nirvana's cover of Lead Belly's "Where Did You Sleep Last Night."

"After that, I started to buy these cheap compilation CDs called *Blues Influences of...*" she says. "There was a great unpolished, angularity to a lot of those songs—an old, weird sound that mirrored the somewhat louder but equally off-beat weirdness that I would always look for in the relatively more contemporary music I was listening to."

Raymond's affinity for that old weird sound can be heard on her debut full-length album, *You Were Never Much of a Dancer*, which brings together blues, roots, banjo music, and a healthy dose of American Primitive-style

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picking on a collection of 12 original instrumentals and one cover. She also pays tribute to one of her favorite artists with the song “Requiem for John Fahey.” “He was able to somehow express the verbally inexpressible with his instrumentals,” Raymond says. “That was, and is, very inspiring to me.”

As for whether or not the Welsh-born Raymond finds it odd to be expressing herself through such specifically American forms of music? The answer is: not really.

“American folk music is really a hodge-podge of harmonic traditions from lots of other countries, and especially Britain,” she

reasons, adding, “I think the great signature of Americanness on this music is a very cinematic sense of expanse—I find it both isolating and comforting, and somehow nostalgic. The Welsh word *hiraeth* might apply. It doesn’t directly translate, but sometimes it can be used to convey a sense of homesickness for a place or time that never existed.”

## PLAYING TIP

Raymond offers unique advice on how to become a better fingerpicker—repetition and watching TV. “A lot of my songs hang off of driving alternating thumb bass lines, and the

only way I’ve found I’m able to do that well is to make it completely mindless, turning the thumb into a third party that acts entirely on its own accord,” she says. “So, seriously, sit and watch Netflix while your thumb goes off and does its own thing. And while that’s happening get the other fingers to join in—slowly working their way through increasingly complicated melodies.”

Raymond demonstrates this sort of repetition in open-D-minor tuning in **Example 5**, starting with a thumb-picked alternating bass line, adding double stops with her index and middle fingers, and then single-note syncopations in the last four measures. Try coming up with some of your own picking patterns over the steady thumb bass, in open D minor or the tuning of your choosing.

## Example 4

**Sarah Louise Henson**

\*Tuning: D G D A C D, down a half step

Am(add4)

\* Music sounds a minor second lower than written.

## WHAT SHE PLAYS

1929 Supertone Bradley Kincaid “Houn’ Dog” parlor guitar with Martin SP Lifespan 80/20 bronze custom light-gauge strings (primary guitar), Grafton #3.5 and #4 banjos with .011 gauge strings, National Polychrome Tricone resonator with phosphor-bronze Michael Messer National Guitar strings (.013 gauge), Regal squareneck dobro with D’Addario .015 gauge strings. Raymond’s primary live guitar, she says, “was gifted to me by the mighty Henry Kaiser—an 1890 model built by Joseph Bohmann.” Thumbpicks: Dunlop plastic. Fingerpicks: Dunlop 15-gauge steel on index and middle fingers.

AC

## Example 5

**Gwenifer Raymond**

Tuning: D A D F A D

Dm



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# The Golden Age of Vintage Guitar Buying

Navigating online guitar auctions

BY MICHAEL WRIGHT

Not that many years ago, if you wanted to enjoy the pleasures of playing a vintage guitar, you had to haunt pawnshops, comb the inventory of mom-and-pop music stores, and pore over endless classified print ads. Then along came eBay and everything changed. Today, virtually everyone who wants to sell a guitar—even a brick-and-mortar store—lists it on public internet auction sites. The result is that almost every guitar for sale in the world

can be seen on your screen, and the potential buyers are practically limitless. If you are not already addicted to online guitar auctions, here is a pragmatic introduction to navigating this brave new world of musical commerce.

## WHAT KINDS OF ONLINE GUITAR AUCTIONS ARE THERE?

Online guitar-auction sites consist of three basic types. One class involves professional

auction houses that have specialty departments handling vintage musical instruments (e.g., Skinner Auctioneers in the U.S. or Gardiner Houlgate in the U.K.). These operate much like live auctions, with timed events during which subscriber participants compete. Sales can be national or international, with associated costs. Offerings are limited to the house's inventory and the number of bidders is restricted.

Another type of auction is national or regional, as in only held in Korea, Vietnam, or the E.U. These are public auction sites similar to eBay, where anyone in the country can list a guitar and anyone within that country can bid. As far as I'm aware, Buyee in Japan is the only country-specific site designed to handle international bidding/buying. (Buyee is actually an intermediary for Japan's Yahoo Auctions.) Merchandise won is shipped by the seller to Buyee's Osaka warehouse, where it is then reshipped to you, arriving in four to six days, or six weeks or more, depending on the shipping method you choose.

In addition to the special case of Buyee, the third and most accessible type of site involves public auctions that are open to virtually anybody and feature the broadest spectrum of used and vintage guitars: eBay.com, the world's largest general merchandise auction site, and Reverb.com, dedicated to music gear. (Note that many guitars are co-listed on both eBay and Reverb, often for different prices.)

## HOW DO ONLINE GUITAR AUCTIONS WORK?

Taking part in these public auctions is easy. You register your user name and email address and then set up a payment method, using either PayPal (allowing use of both bank account and credit card; highly recommended) or just a credit card. You can start bidding immediately.

There are a number of variations on a guitar auction. The simplest is a "no reserve" auction. The seller puts a starting price on a guitar and agrees to sell it for whatever it ends at. The starting price might be low, say \$9.99. Or it might be at market value, e.g., \$1,200. A starting price that's higher forces you to decide whether you *really* want to pay that much or not. If it's a fair market price, go for it. You'll likely have less competition and you'll kick yourself in the morning if you don't.

While starting the no-reserve auction very low can be risky for the seller, it often sparks a bidding frenzy that can result in a much higher sale price. The low-start bidding frenzy works by hooking bidders on the desire to get that guitar for a bargain price. That desire





then transforms into a burning need to win with an irrational, vigorous defense no matter the cost! Bidding frenzies are common and real. It's a good idea to decide—and stick to—your limit before getting caught up in the frenzy phenomenon. Tell yourself that it's OK to let a guitar go if the price gets too high.

In a reserve auction, the seller lists the guitar at a low price (e.g., \$0.01) but will not sell it until the auction reaches the reserve price (e.g., \$450). This protects the seller's investment in the guitar while hoping to ignite a bidding frenzy, which rarely happens. Bidders tend to be way more cautious on reserve price auctions. No one wants to be first to hit the reserve price because that tells everyone else what they might have to pay to get the guitar, greatly reducing the possibility of a bargain. Reserve auctions tend to have a flurry of bids in the final moments. The best way to win one of these is to honestly ask yourself how much you'd really pay, bid your best number right at the end, and take your chances. Hey, if you don't win, another will always show up.

Buy It Now (BIN) auctions are a kind of hybrid. The price can start lower or higher but the seller offers an option—usually at a healthy price premium—to click a BIN button, ending the auction and paying the asking price. If you know what a guitar is worth and really want it, BINs can be the least anxiety-producing auction. Just pay the tab and be done with it. The guitar is yours!

Or Best Offer (OBO) auctions provide the option for you to offer a lower bid than the current asking price. If a seller offers OBO, he or she is willing to take less by definition. But don't get too greedy. The seller still has to make some money. Offering 50 percent less can be insulting. Offering around 10 percent less might result in acceptance, or at least a counteroffer. If the seller has a reasonable shipping cost, offering the asking price less the shipping amount is often a successful strategy. (The seller may be able to deduct the shipping as a business expense at tax time.) Even without OBO, you can always contact any seller and politely ask if a lower price would be entertained. It's not unusual for a seller to agree to lower the price, especially if the guitar has been for sale for a while.

Japanese Buyee/Yahoo auctions feature a unique, convenient Snipe function that lets you enter a bid in advance that will be placed five minutes before the auction closes. That still leaves plenty of time for counterbids, so be sure to enter your true maximum.

Auctions typically run from three to nine days, though they can be shorter or can be relisted any number of times. As a bidder, you



1890 Joseph Bohmann,  
very early steel-string  
guitar bought on eBay.

## HERE'S HOW

don't know if a guitar will be relisted or not, so if you want it but are on the fence, take the plunge. Once you've won an auction you will be expected to pay for it, usually within three days.

### HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU BID?

When you put down an auction bid, you're morally obligated to honor your commitment. Before you bid, you should balance the guitar's value against the total final costs. You may be able to get a quick read on value with the price-guide function on Reverb or by narrowing an eBay search to sold auctions. If you are considering expensive guitars, invest in *Vintage Guitar Magazine's* annual price guide or subscribe to the online *Blue Book of Guitar Values*. A Google search should turn up some current dealer inventory.

Your final costs on American public auctions will be the end-price plus shipping, which on guitars can usually range from \$35 to \$100, unless the seller offers free shipping. International sellers can cost more. If you're looking at Buyee in Japan, keep in mind that you'll pay

the end price plus taxes and a percentage transaction fee (about \$50 on a \$250 guitar) and then shipping, which can run \$150 or much more, depending on the size and weight of the packaging. I've gotten Japanese classical guitars on Buyee for \$27 that cost close to \$200 after all fees were calculated.

### WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

The majority of guitar auctions go smoothly, but occasionally problems come up. The best thing you can do to prevent problems is to be vigilant. Problems are most common when you make assumptions. Look for very detailed descriptions and read every word carefully. Look really closely at all the pictures. If the slightest detail raises a question, ask the seller about it before you bid. Not sure if a case is included? Ask. As a potential buyer, you have the right to inquire about known repairs or if any parts have been replaced, all affecting the investment value. If you're not satisfied with an answer, move on. If you buy a guitar without due diligence and there was no deliberate

seller misrepresentation, you have little legitimate recourse. Anyone active in auctions has made this mistake a time or two, by the way!

Accidents do occur in shipping, although there's been a remarkable improvement among shipping companies in the last few years, no doubt due in part to the large quantity of guitars now travelling around the world. If a guitar arrives damaged, immediately take lots of pictures of the item and packaging. Inform the seller, sending pictures. Always be polite! The seller will likely claim no responsibility and blame the shipper. The shipper will likely claim poor packaging, blaming the seller. If the damage is repairable and you really want the guitar, the seller might give you a partial refund. Sites such as eBay will arbitrate a claim. If the seller is deemed liable, you'll return the guitar and get a refund. If the shipper is guilty, good luck.

On rare occasions, a seller may misrepresent a guitar, either deliberately or, more likely, out of ignorance—a guitar found in grandpa's attic or at a yard sale sold by someone who has no clue about guitars (and you didn't ask). Some sellers allow returns or may offer a full or partial refund. Auction host sites have procedures for handling complaints and will arbitrate. Prepare to document your case extensively and persuasively. If you have a good case, you are likely to prevail. Auction sites such as eBay are tilted toward protecting the buyer.

### FEEDBACK

Sites like eBay, Reverb, and Buyee all employ feedback as a metric for sellers (eBay rates buyers, as well). This method allows you to award a number of stars and leave a brief text message. For eBay, sellers are expected to have 100 percent favorable five-star ratings in order to keep selling, so feedback can have a direct economic effect on someone's livelihood. Feedback should be approached with gravitas. If an auction concludes satisfactorily, leave excellent feedback. Negative feedback should only be given if the seller has been a complete jerk and all avenues of appeal have been tried. In cases where I was dissatisfied but there was no obvious deception (I didn't ask enough questions), I just choose not to leave feedback at all, neutral being better than negative.

Buying guitars on public auction sites lacks the romance of the good old days when you had to ferret out treasures from want ads and pawnshops. Then again, online auctions literally bring a whole world of guitar choices right to your doorstep. If you want to enjoy the pleasures of playing a vintage guitar, this brave new world of online auctions is a golden age. **AC**





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# Scale Models, Part 2

The second in a two-part lesson on how to build scales

BY GRETCHEN MENN

## THE PROBLEM

You've developed a basic understanding of major scales, but have yet to get them completely under your fingers across the neck—or apply what you've learned toward the natural minor scale.

## THE SOLUTION

Study the major scales in each position, then use that knowledge to systematically approach the minor scale.

This lesson expands on last month's introduction to the major scale, which is a great foundation for understanding and learning every other mode. Your mission was to take the concepts discussed and discover your own scalar shapes. If you haven't done this already, I can't stress enough how helpful the process is. Having the shapes be an outgrowth of your understanding ensures a host of benefits: You strengthen your knowledge of the fretboard and put it to practical use, you reinforce your understanding of major scales through having to form them, and you develop the ability to reconstruct scales and shapes on the fly through your grasp of the theory.

We live in an era that places a premium on immediate gratification, which can be detrimental to deeper learning. Let me invoke your patience. After all, if you're going to spend any time learning scales, why not *really* learn them? Why not *own* them? In the long run it'll be a much better use of your time than glossing over an opportunity to grow as a musician.

### 1 CHECK IN WITH THE MAJOR SCALES

After all the cautionary words about why you should figure these out for yourself, **Example 1** shows some useful fingerings for the major scale. Remember: 1 = first (index) finger, 2 = second (middle), 3 = third (ring), 4 = fourth (pinky), and 0 = open string. Use these fingerings as a reference to compare with your independent study.



Example 2 uses the F major scale to get you started learning the other major keys.

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As you go through each pattern, don't let your mind get lazy and lapse into purely mechanical thinking. Really know each note and how it relates to the scale. Play the patterns descending as well as ascending. Isolate sections and create melodic lines within them. Jump between scale degrees and strings.

### 2 SEE THE CONNECTIONS

The beauty of being familiar with both the theory and the fretboard is that you'll be eligible for a 12-for-the-price-of-one deal: Learn the fingerings for C major, and you'll know all 12 keys. All the scale shapes (with the exception of the first shape, in open position) are moveable; in any other major key, these same patterns will apply. You'll just have to transpose them, reorienting around your new key center. **Example 2** uses the F major scale to get you started with this concept. First, find the notes in F major by applying the pattern of half and whole steps (W W H W W W H) to get the following note collection: F G A B $\flat$  C D E F.

Then go to the F on the first fret of the E string and spell out the scale. Does it look familiar? Compare it to C major starting on C of the E string. This is your form for a major scale starting with the root on the E string. Now try it starting on the second degree (G),

as shown in bars 3–4 of Ex. 2, and then moving up the fretboard (not shown in notation). As you connect the F major scale in various positions, you should find that you already know the shapes.

Want to play an A major scale starting on the root? No problem. Find the A on your E string, use the major scale fingering you now know, and there you go. In looking at scales this way, I would strongly urge you to resist the temptation to think exclusively in terms of finger patterns. Instead, maintain active focus by saying the notes aloud as you play them. Skip between notes, deepening your knowledge of both the scale and fretboard. And always remember to engage your ear by really hearing what each note sounds like within the context of the key.

### 3 KNOW YOUR KEY SIGNATURES

As you start exploring keys with more sharps and flats, you'll see why key signatures are so useful. In conventional notation, a key signature is displayed at the beginning of each staff of music, just to the right of the clef and to the left of the time signature. A key signature indicates which notes are to have sharps or flats, unless otherwise indicated with an accidental (sharp or #; flat or  $\flat$ , or natural or  $\natural$  sign). Key signatures alleviate the burden of needing to input every sharp or flat inherent





## Example 1

C major, open position (starting on E)

C major, first position (starting on F)

\*Fingering:

0 1 3 0 2 3 0 2 3 0 2 0 1 3 0 1 3      1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 2 4 1 2 4

C major, third position (starting on G)

C major, fifth position (starting on A)

1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 2 3 1 2 4      1 3 4 1 3 4 1 2 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4

C major, seventh position (starting on B)

C major, eighth position (starting on C)

1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 2 4 1 2 4      1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 2 4 1 2 4

C major, tenth position (starting on D)

C major, twelfth position (starting on E)

1 3 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 1 3 4 1 3 4      1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 2 4

## Example 2

F major, first position (starting on F)

F major, third position (starting on G)

to a given key, and also allow you to easily identify the key of a piece.

**Figure 1** shows the various sharp and flat key signatures, both major and minor. Notice that for every major key, there is a minor key with the same key signature. That is not to be confused with being the same key—they each have their own tonal center and associated chord progressions (more on that in a future lesson), but the fact that they share all the same notes makes them relative keys.

Here's a quick way to know which major key is associated with a key signature: For sharp keys, the key is a half-step up from the last sharp. So if the last sharp in the key signature is C#, go up a half step to get the key of D major. For flat keys, the key is the second to the last flat. Using this method, the only two key signatures you have to memorize outright are C major (no sharps or flats) and F major (one flat).

### 4 GET INTO THE MINOR MODE

Just as the characteristic sound of the major scale comes from its pattern of half and whole steps, so does that of the natural minor scale, often called just the minor scale. In this scale, the half steps occur between degrees 2–3 and 5–6. So if you start on A, you get A B C D E F G A. Look like the same notes of any other scale you know? No sharps or flats

means it shares the same notes as C major, which is the relative major of A minor. With that big clue to fuel you, I encourage you to work out the minor scales the same way you approached the major scales—you should now be able to get started on your own. We will add one slight variation to tune your ear: play the tonic minor chord before and after each scale. This will help you hear the minor key, rather than the relative major.

The process is:

1. Pick a scale—start with A minor.
2. Write down the scale pattern with scale degree numbers and corresponding half and whole steps. Then input the note names above each scale degree.
3. Transfer the note names to notation on a standard staff. The Acoustic Guitar Notation Guide, available as a free PDF download at [store.acousticguitar.com/collections/freebies](http://store.acousticguitar.com/collections/freebies), includes a blank, printable sheet of staff paper if you need one.
4. Grab your guitar and play an A minor chord. Then, starting on the low E string, map out all of the notes in the A minor scale in the open position using two or three notes per string. End by playing an A minor chord again.
5. Once you're sure of the notes, find comfortable fingerings.

6. Move up to the next note in the scale—in this case, the sixth scale degree of A minor, the first-fret F on string 6. With your first finger on F, go through the notes of the scale across the strings, again using two or three notes per string, and no open strings.

7. Continue to find the patterns starting on each note of the scale, moving up the neck so you cover each position. Notice how they are the same patterns as the C major scale, but with a different tonal center: What was C major starting on the sixth scale degree now becomes the A minor scale starting on the root, and what was C major starting on the root is A minor starting on the third.

If, as you diligently familiarize yourself with the minor-scale shapes, you find yourself considering throwing in the towel and sneaking a peek at fingerings or shapes someone else has worked out for you, turn to this proverb for strength: “I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand.”

Put in the time and mental effort and devote your attention to the task at hand. It will be well worth it.

*Gretchen Menn is a guitarist and composer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She writes, records, and performs original music and is a member of the popular Led Zeppelin tribute band Zepparella. [gretchenmenn.com](http://gretchenmenn.com)*

**Figure 1**  
Key Signatures

C major/ A minor	G major/ E minor	D major/ B minor	A major/ F# minor	E major/ C# minor	B major/ G# minor	F# major/ D# minor	C# major/ A# minor
F major/ D minor	Bb major/ G minor	Eb major/ C minor	Ab major/ F minor	Db major/ Bb minor	Gb major/ Eb minor	Cb major/ Ab minor	



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# Liberal Rag

An easy but satisfying ragtime piece for players of all levels

BY MARY FLOWER

As a roots and blues musician, I spend a fair amount of time in open tunings. I've written a few songs in open G6 (low to high: D G D G B E), a rootsy, quirky, and satisfying tuning that early blues musician Bo Carter put to good use on songs like "I Want You to Know" and "Who's Been Here."

It's easy to get into open G6 and to maneuver within it. From standard tuning, drop the two lowest strings a whole step (from E to D; and A to G); or think open G (D G D G B D), but leave the first string alone. That high E on top creates the sixth of a G chord, a very useful harmonic color.

In this lesson, I'll show you how to play an approachable ragtime piece of mine in open G6 called "Liberal Rag," a title I chose not necessarily as a political statement but to indicate that it can be played at an easy and relaxed tempo, by players at all levels. First, I'll present the main theme and then a couple of variations that are slightly less easy to play. With any luck, you'll emerge with a fun rag under your belt, as well as an understanding of basic chord forms in open G6.

## THE RAG

I've notated the basic 16-bar form of "Liberal Rag," which is in the key of G major, in **Example 1**. The beauty of using G6 tuning for a rag in this key is that it allows for many of the I chord (G6/G) measures to be played with just one fretting finger—try your third finger on the third-fret A#. Played against the open B string, the A# lends a characteristic ragtime sound. These two notes are a half step apart and give the feeling of humor, train wreck, or edginess, depending on your mood!

The picking hand plays a much more active role, with a 5–4–6–4 thumb pattern in the G6 measures and roots in octaves on the V chord (those with a root of D). Meanwhile, the index and middle fingers articulate the melodies. Note that the rhythm of the melody is identical in 12 of the 17 measures—four consecutive eighth notes tied to a half. This repeated rhythm helps give coherence to the piece, and also lends the kind of ragged feel that's such a big part of ragtime.

For the V chord measures (bars 4–7 and 15), I maintain a common D7 shape—with my first and second fingers on strings 2 and 3, respectively. Note the melodic and harmonic

Mary Flower



BILL EVANS

color I get by adding a descending series of notes on string 1. The open E gives me a D9 chord; playing the third-fret G with my fourth finger creates D7sus4; and stopping the second-fret F# with my third finger results in D7.

There are only two measures of the IV chord (C), which is based on the same grip as in standard tuning, but with string 5 played open instead of stopped at the third fret. Since the open fifth string is G, the C chord's fifth is in the bass, making for smooth transitions between the G chords in bars 11 and 14.

In bar 16, notice the octaves I get by pinching the two D strings or the two G strings. Try playing the octaves on the lower string pair with your second finger on string 6 and your third on string 4. Moves like these can strengthen a bass run or melody while adding an interesting change of texture.

## THE VARIATIONS

After you've learned "Liberal Rag" in its basic form, try a neat descending bass line (**Example 2**), which you can plug into bars 1–2 and 8–9 of Ex. 1. If you keep your second finger on the third-fret A# you should have no problem grabbing the fourth-fret F# and second-fret E with your third and first fingers, respectively. Alternatively, you could play the A# with your third finger and the sixth-string notes with your fourth and first fingers.

Next, learn a more involved variation, shifting the melodic activity higher up the neck. Prepare for this by familiarizing yourself with the grips shown in **Example 3**—an open-D shape in seventh position for the G chord; a short-barre A7 form in that same position for D7; and an open-A shape at fret 5, with the fourth finger at fret 8, for the C chord. Note

that all of these chords sound particularly rich with their open G and D bass notes. Make sure that all of them are securely under your fingers before proceeding.

I use all three chords in a full variation on "Liberal Rag" in **Example 4**, which obviously asks more of the fretting hand than Ex. 1. Efficiency is important here, so hold down each chord shape for as long as possible—three full measures on the first G chord, for instance. When you switch to the D7 chord in bar 4, maintain a half barre at fret 7, while moving your second finger from string 2 to string 1.

As for your picking hand, note the greater distance that the thumb travels between strings than in the previous examples. In the G measures, for instance, the pattern is root, then up a fifth plus an octave, down two octaves, and up two octaves. This new pattern might take a bit of getting used to. On the D7 chord, take care to avoid inadvertently picking the open fifth string (G), which is not part of the chord.

Here's something cool: Although I wrote these variations for solo guitar, Ex. 1 and Ex. 4 can be simultaneously played as a guitar duo. Pair up with a buddy to do this, and you'll hear all sorts of interesting interlocking patterns throughout, as well as some neat contrary motion—one guitar plays an ascending line, while the other descends—at the first ending.

Whether you play "Liberal Rag" solo or duo, I hope that you'll feel inspired to create some of your own variations on the piece—and that you'll spend time exploring the possibilities unique to this nifty open tuning.

Mary Flower is an award-winning guitarist, touring artist, and teacher based in Portland, Oregon. [maryflower.com](http://maryflower.com)



**Tuning: D G D G B E**

### Example 1

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part in standard notation and a corresponding bass guitar part in tablature. The guitar part is in the key of D major (indicated by two sharps) and 4/4 time. The first four measures are labeled with chords G6 and D9. The bass part is written in a simplified style using numbers 0, 1, and 2 on the strings. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format with a light gray background.

The first system of the musical score for 'The Sound of Silence' by Simon & Garfunkel. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the melody and a bass clef staff for the bass line. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The melody starts on a whole note G4 (labeled '5' above the staff) and continues with eighth and quarter notes. The bass line starts on a whole note G2 and continues with eighth and quarter notes. The system is divided into four measures, each with a chord symbol above it: D7sus4, D7, D9, and G6. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signature, notes, rests, and chord symbols.

[illegible]

**Cont. from p. 49**

### Example 2

**G6**

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody in G major, 4/4 time, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of two measures: the first measure contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note G4; the second measure contains a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, and a half note B4. Below the melody, the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string guitar. The first measure of the guitar part consists of a whole note chord G2-B2-D3, followed by a half note G2, and then a whole note chord G2-B2-D3. The second measure consists of a whole note chord G2-B2-D3, followed by a half note G2, and then a whole note chord G2-B2-D3. The second system shows the vocal melody in G major, 4/4 time, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of two measures: the first measure contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note G4; the second measure contains a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, and a half note B4. Below the melody, the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string guitar. The first measure of the guitar part consists of a whole note chord G2-B2-D3, followed by a half note G2, and then a whole note chord G2-B2-D3. The second measure consists of a whole note chord G2-B2-D3, followed by a half note G2, and then a whole note chord G2-B2-D3.

### Example 3

### Example 4

## G

**D<sub>7</sub>**

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Wind" by The Beatles. It features two staves: a guitar staff (top) and a bass staff (bottom). The guitar staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass staff is in bass clef. The guitar part consists of a repeating melodic line in the first four measures, followed by a variation in the fifth measure. The bass part provides a steady accompaniment with a repeating eighth-note pattern. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format with standard musical notation.

Musical score for guitar, measures 9-12. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 9 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains eighth notes: F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5. The bass staff contains whole notes: F#2, G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3. Measure 10 continues the pattern. Measure 11 continues the pattern. Measure 12 ends with a double bar line and a C/G chord symbol.

13

G D7

1. G

2.

5 8 5 8 5 8 8 7 8 7 8 7 7 8 7 8 7 8 7 7 6 5 7 7 6 5 0 0 0 0 0 0 7 7 0



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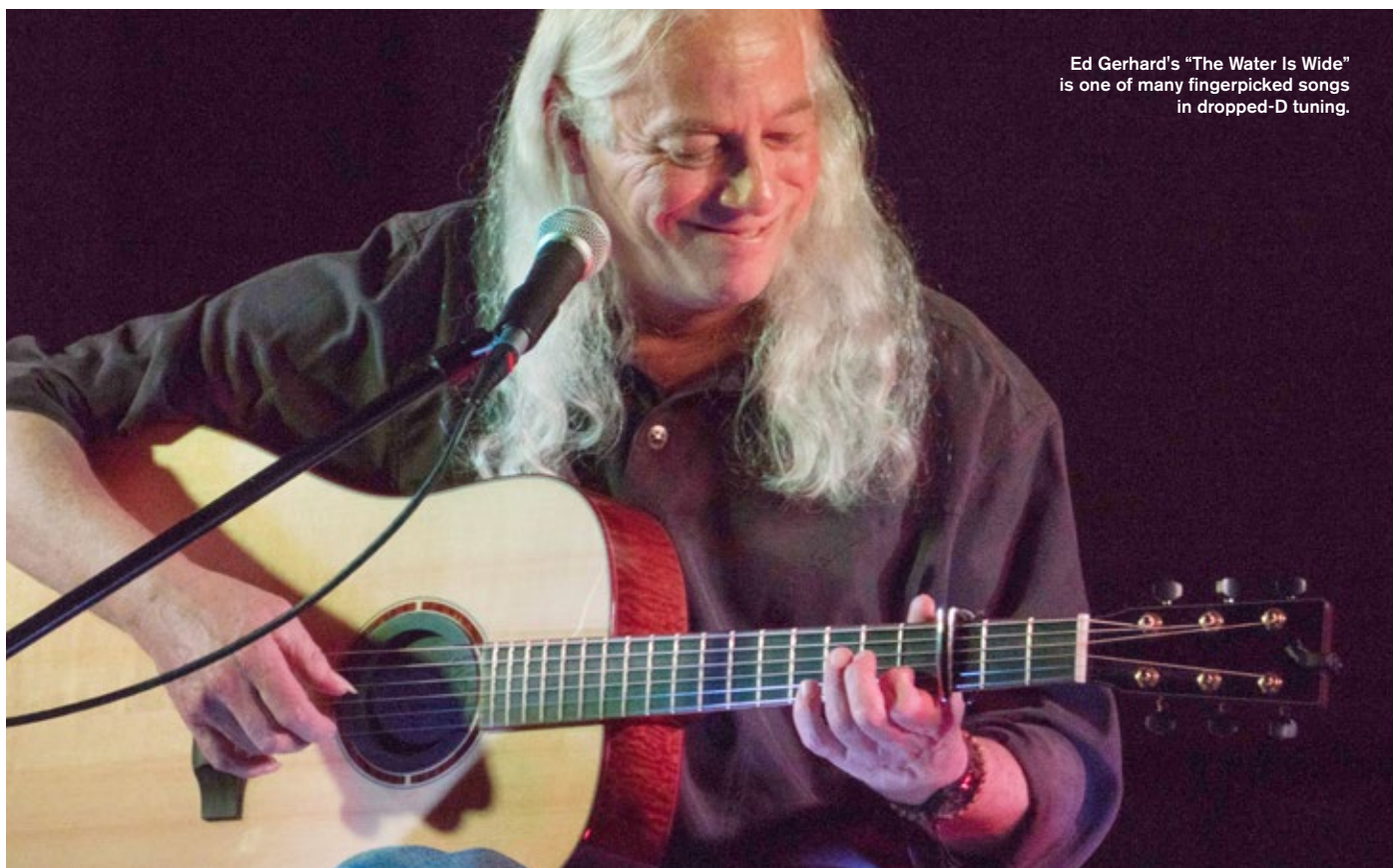
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Ed Gerhard's "The Water Is Wide" is one of many fingerpicked songs in dropped-D tuning.

MARCUS WICHERT

# Dropped-D Fingerpicking

Explore this tuning through a sampling of instrumentals

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Fingerpicking and dropped-D tuning fit together like hand and glove. For evidence, just consider the long list of fingerpicking classics played in dropped D, which includes Jorma Kaukonen's "Embryonic Journey," Pete Seeger's "Living in the Country," the Beatles' "Dear Prudence," Bert Jansch's "Black Water Side," Bruce Cockburn's "Wondering Where the Lions Are," Ed Gerhard's "The Water Is Wide," and Chet Atkins' "The Entertainer," to name a few. (To listen to these selections and more, search on Spotify for `spotify:user:peppero` and check out the playlist "Dropped-D guitar tuning sampler.")

Dropped-D tuning, where you lower the sixth string a whole step to D, is such a natural fit for fingerpicking because of the open-string bass notes—under a D chord, the tuning gives you a satisfying low root (D) on string 6, plus a fifth (A, on string 5) and the root an octave up (string 4). Since you don't have to finger any of these root or fifth bass notes under a D chord, your

fretting hand is free to venture around the neck while your picking-hand thumb handles the bass.

This workout will help you get going with fingerpicking in dropped D through a series of little instrumental tunes. So drop your guitar's sixth string to D, stow away your flatpick, and get fingerpicking.

## WEEK ONE

One of the pleasures of fingerpicking in dropped D is playing a Travis-style alternating bass on the open strings. Try it out in **Example 1**, a simple

ragtime-inspired tune built on the I, IV, and V chords (in the key of D, that's D, G, and A), with a quick appearance by the II (E7).

Take a look at the bass part first, shown with downward-facing stems in the notation. Play the down-stemmed notes in this lesson with your thumb, and the up-stemmed notes with your index, middle, and (if you wish) ring fingers. On the D, G, and E7 chords, alternate the bass mostly between strings 6 and 4; note how on the G you need to go up to the fifth fret on the sixth string because of the lowered tuning. On the A, alternate between strings 5 and 4.

## Beginners' Tip #1

If you're new to alternating bass fingerpicking, first practice the thumb by itself until the motion is automatic. Then add the other fingers.

## Beginners' Tip #2

For 12/8 time, count four sets of triplets: 1 and uh, 2 and uh, 3 and uh, 4 and uh.





**WEEK 1**

**Tuning: D A D G B E**

**Example 1**

Example 1 musical notation showing chords (D, G, A, D, G, A, D, G, E7, A, D/F#, A, D) and fingerings for the D A D G B E tuning.

**WEEK 2**

**Example 2**

Example 2 musical notation showing chords (Dm, A, G, Dm, A, Dm) and fingerings for the D A D G B E tuning.

Cont. on p. 55

Measures 5–8 get a little more complex in the bass, alternating on three strings. On the G, that means grabbing the B on fret 2, string 5. On the A, fret the sixth string at the second fret to add the low E bass note. I use a first-finger barre for A on strings 4–2 and fret the sixth string with my second finger. If you're comfortable fretting with your thumb, you might use that digit instead on the sixth string.

On the treble side, you play pinches (picking treble and bass strings simultaneously), as well as notes on the offbeats. Many measures—1, 3, and 5, for example—end with a syncopated note on the *and* of beat 4 that anticipates and rings into the next measure. In bar 16, use a first-finger barre for the A chord and add the D/F# on top for just one beat; this fingering also alters the bass line, putting an F# in the bass instead of an E.

## WEEK TWO

As indicated by the Week One example, dropped D is great for fingerpicking melodies above a bass line. I have written several songs by doing just that—finding a melody with my fingers and then singing along with it. A case in point is **Example 2**, from a tune of mine titled “Somehow.”

Rather than using an alternating bass, play a steady monotone bass—all on the sixth string except for one measure of A on an open string.

Use a little palm muting (rest your picking hand palm lightly on the bass strings by the bridge) to deepen the slow blues feel.

To bring this melody to life, use hammer-ons and pull-offs as indicated. On beat 4 of measures 1 and 5, pull quickly off the third string for a grace-note ornament. The slide in the last measure is also a grace note: simultaneously slide up the fifth string and pick the open fourth and sixth strings, creating a three-string D drone.

In the full version of “Somehow,” I sing in unison with this guitar melody. When I wrote the song, I was essentially trying to find words that matched what the guitar was singing—because of dropped D.

## WEEK THREE

Thanks again to those open-string bass notes, dropped D gives you a lot of latitude to move up the neck. In **Example 3**, start up at the tenth fret on the treble strings and then stay in seventh position from measure 3 till the last two beats. Use the alternating bass on strings 6 and 4 for the D chord. On the A chord, fretting the fourth string at the seventh fret gives you an octave bass note.

**Example 4** provides more practice with fingerpicking up the neck, this time in the key of D minor. Stay in fifth position throughout, adding the open first string under Dm to create a Dm9

chord, and the open second string under Am for Am(add9). When you hit G in measure 5, fret the sixth string with your first finger so you're still in position to hold down the seventh and sixth frets in the next measure.

## WEEK FOUR

Obviously, when fingerpicking in dropped D, you can do much more than play with an alternating or monotone bass—and you shouldn't limit yourself to the key of D, either. **Example 5** comes from an original instrumental of mine titled “Side by Side,” which began as a solo guitar piece and is now arranged as a guitar and flute duet. This tune is in the key of G, which works beautifully with dropped-D tuning because you have the low bass note available under the V (D) chord. The picking style is mostly arpeggios with a melody articulated on the second and third strings.

This excerpt opens with a long position shift. In bar 1, start with your first finger at the third fret of the B string and slide up to the eighth fret while the open fourth and third strings ring below, and then stay high on the neck for the Bm and C chords. Throughout, open strings facilitate the position changes up and down the neck. Let the notes ring as long as possible for a flowing sound.

I hope these examples inspire further explorations in dropped-D fingerpicking. Any type of fingerstyle will adapt well to the tuning, and you can try a variety of keys—not just D and G, but A (major and minor) and Em, for starters.

*Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, the founding editor of Acoustic Guitar, is author of the new AG Guide Beyond Strumming. [beyondstrumming.com](http://beyondstrumming.com)*

## Beginners' Tip #3

For the smoothest sound, keep your fretting hand in the same position on the neck when you can.

## Beginners' Tip #4

In **Example 5**, fret only the notes you need—there are no more than two or three in each chord.

## TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Try your hand at improvising your own little tunes in dropped D. First, play through these scales: D Mixolydian (D E F# G A B C) with the b3 (F-) and #4 (G#) notes added, in

two positions. Get a D bass line going on the low open strings (alternating, monotone, or just half or whole notes) and try making up melodies using these notes.





Cont. from p. 53

**WEEK 3**

**Example 3**

Example 3 is a musical exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a D major chord and an A major chord. The exercise consists of five measures. The first measure is a whole note D chord. The second measure is a whole note A chord. The third measure is a whole note D chord. The fourth measure is a whole note A chord. The fifth measure is a whole note D chord. The guitar part is written in standard notation, showing the fretting hand positions for each chord.

**Example 4**

Example 4 is a musical exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a variety of chords including A7, D, Dm9, Am(add9), Dm7, and G. The exercise consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system starts with a whole note A7 chord, followed by a whole note D chord, a whole note Dm9 chord, and a whole note Am(add9) chord. The second system starts with a whole note Dm7 chord, followed by a whole note Am(add9) chord, a whole note G chord, a whole note G7 chord, and a whole note Dm7 chord. The guitar part is written in standard notation, showing the fretting hand positions for each chord.

**WEEK 4**

**Example 5**

Example 5 is a musical exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a variety of chords including G, Bm, C, G, Am7, and D. The exercise consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system starts with a whole note G chord, followed by a whole note Bm chord, a whole note C chord, a whole note G chord, and a whole note Am7 chord. The second system starts with a whole note G chord, followed by a whole note D chord, a whole note D chord, and a whole note G chord. The guitar part is written in standard notation, showing the fretting hand positions for each chord.



READERS' PICK

# Layla

Tackling Eric Clapton's *Unplugged* classic

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

In 1970 Eric Clapton, pining for George Harrison's then-wife, Pattie Boyd, wrote what is arguably one of the greatest rock songs about unrequited love: "Layla." Clapton's original recording of the song, with the blues-rock band Derek and the Dominos (on the album *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*), has a palpable urgency intensified by Duane Allman's electric slide guitar.

When Clapton revisited "Layla" for his 1992 MTV *Unplugged* appearance, he transformed the song into something much more relaxed, singing it an octave lower, decelerating its tempo, and ditching the original extended piano coda. But Clapton's fiery guitar work is

still present on the *Unplugged* version, and in this stripped-down setting, the intensity of his playing is even more noticeable.

Clapton recorded the *Unplugged* version with a co-guitarist, Andy Fairweather Low, but the arrangement here is streamlined for a single guitar. The notation captures Clapton's solos note for note, while giving a sampling of the riff that powers the intro, solos, and chorus, as well as suggesting chord voicings to play in the verses.

Begin learning the tune by focusing on the main riff, depicted in the first three measures. Key to nailing the riff is making sure you hit the chords on time. There are two chords per

measure, and chord changes fall on the *ands* of 2 and 4, rather than squarely on beats 1 and 3. Also, note that Clapton plays the riff with lots of subtle variations—be sure to check them out on the original recording.

The solos both fall pretty much entirely within the D natural minor scale (D E F G A B $\flat$  C)—the first (bars 4–9) moving between the tenth and fifth positions, and the second (35–50) mostly stationed in the tenth position—and make extensive use of eighth-note triplets (three evenly spaced notes per beat). By all means learn these exemplary blues solos exactly as written, but use them as springboards for improvising on your own. **AC**



Eric Clapton

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## Intro

Moderately slow

(♩ = 73)

1., 2. 3.

Dm B♭ C Dm Dm

## Guitar Solo

B♭ C Dm

B♭ C Dm

B♭ C N.C.

## Verse

C#m7

x1312x 4 fr.

G#7

131211 4 fr.

1. What \_\_\_\_\_ will you do when you get lone - ly, \_\_\_\_\_  
 2., 3. See additional lyrics

Cont. on p. 58

AcousticGuitar.com 57

# LAYLA

Cont. from p. 57

12

**C#m7** x1312X 4 fr. **C** x1333x **D** x1333x 5 fr. **E** 023100 **E7** 020130 **F#m** 134111 **B7** x13334

no - one wait - in' by your \_\_\_\_ side? \_\_\_\_ You've \_\_\_\_ been \_\_\_\_ run - nin',

15

**E** 023100 **A** x0111x **F#m** 134111 **B** x1333x **E** 023100 **A** x0111x

hid - in' much too \_\_\_\_ long. You know it's just your fool - ish pride. Lay - la, \_\_\_\_

## Chorus

18

**Dm** **Bb** **C** **Dm** **Bb** **C** **Dm**

\_\_\_\_ you got me on my knees. Lay - la, \_\_\_\_ beg - gin', dar - lin', please. Lay - la, \_\_\_\_

22

**Bb** **C** **Dm** **Bb** **C** 1., 2. N.C.

\_\_\_\_ dar - lin', won't you ease my wor - ried mind?

26

**3.** **Dm** **Bb** **C** **Dm**

Lay - la, \_\_\_\_ got me on my knees. Lay - la, \_\_\_\_

29

**Bb** **C** **Dm** **Bb** **C** **To Coda**

beg - gin', dar - lin', please. Lay - la, \_\_\_\_

32

**Dm** **Bb** **C** **Dm**

dar - lin', won't you ease my wor - ried mind?

5 5 1/4  
6 6 7





# LAYLA

Cont. from p. 59

**D.S. al Coda**  
(take 3rd ending)

**B $\flat$                       C                      D $\flat$**

49

Lay - la,

## Coda

## Outro Free time

51

Dar - lin', won't you ease my wor - ried mind?

*rit.*

**D $\flat$**

54

2. I tried to give you consolation  
Your old man had let you down  
Like a fool, I fell in love with you  
Turned my whole world upside down

3. Make the best of the situation  
Before I finally go insane  
Please don't say we'll never find a way  
Tell me all my love's in vain



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# It Is Well with My Soul

Sad songs say so much

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Horatio Spafford

One of the most well-known hymns in the Christian literature—"It Is Well with My Soul," by Horatio Spafford (1828–1888)—has one of the saddest backstories. In the early 1870s, Spafford, a prominent lawyer and real estate investor, lost most of his properties in the Great Chicago Fire, and then his four-year-old son succumbed to scarlet fever. As a reprieve, in 1873 Spafford sent his family on a boat trip to Europe and all four of his daughters perished when the vessel was wrecked. He composed the words

to "It Is Well with My Soul" when he was en route to meet his grief-stricken wife.

Keep Spafford's tragedies in mind when you play through the lovely arrangement here, which is excerpted from guitarist Steve Baughman's forthcoming book *Gospel Songs for Fingerstyle Guitar*, coming soon to store.AcousticGuitar.com. To get into the song's double dropped-D tuning, just lower your first and second strings by a whole step, from E to D.

The arrangement is fairly undemanding of both the picking and fretting hands and makes

strategic use of the open strings. There are some potentially tricky spots, though, like the single-note runs in bars 4 and 28, and the large stretch between frets 2 and 6 on beat 4 of bar 30. If that stretch is too difficult, just play the E an octave higher, on string 5, fret 7.

Be sure to play the piece unhurriedly, and take the time to observe Baughman's special touches—like the interaction between the ringing open strings and fretted notes in bars 26 and 29—that add sublimity to this moving hymn.

AG

## IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

WORDS BY HORATIO SPAFFORD, MUSIC BY PHILIP BLISS, ARRANGED BY STEVE BAUGHMAN

Tuning: D A D G B D

Slowly

Chords: D<sup>add4</sup>, E<sup>m</sup>, A<sup>7</sup>, D, B<sup>m(b6)</sup>, B<sup>7</sup>, E<sup>7</sup>, A, A<sup>7</sup>, D, G, B<sup>7</sup>, E, E<sup>7</sup>, A<sup>add9</sup>, D, G.



19

D G Em7 D A7

To Coda

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part (top staff) and a bass part (bottom staff). The guitar part is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass part is written in bass clef. The score is divided into measures, with chord diagrams (G, A, D, Bm, A, E7) placed above the guitar staff. The guitar part features various musical notations, including eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests. The bass part includes fret numbers (e.g., 8, 7, 5, 0, 7, 12, 11, 9, 9, 7, 6, 6, 7) and a 4/7 time signature. The score is labeled with the number 27 in the top left corner.

**D.S. al Coda**

31 **Aadd9** **Gsus2** **A** **A7**

**Coda**

**D**

33 **Harm. -1**



# B.B.

A melodic guitar instrumental with an unusual origin story

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Nathan Salsburg

Having accidentally overindulged on a giant bowl of rice and beans, Nathan Salsburg sat down uncomfortably with his guitar one night and got to work. Despite his dyspepsia, a new composition soon announced itself: "Bean Bloat." By the time Salsburg recorded the tune for his most recent album, *Third*, he hadn't found a name he liked better. But he did give it the polite acronym of "B.B."

Salsburg plays "B.B." in a nonstandard tuning—D A D E A E (down a half step)—an accidental discovery on his part. The guitarist says, "I'd written a song ["Dog at Bay"] on my last record in DADEAD and was trying to relearn

it, but neglected to tune the high E down to D. I didn't end up relearning the song, as I got carried away with writing this one instead."

When Salsburg composed the opening bars of "B.B.," he was thinking about the guitar work of the Scottish singer-songwriter Dick Gaughan. "I really love his record *Coppers & Brass*—instrumental settings of traditional Scottish and Irish tunes—all the double stops, hammer-ons, and pull-offs," Salsburg says. "Not that 'B.B.' sounds anything like Dick Gaughan."

This transcription is based on Salsburg's studio version of "B.B." The many hammer-ons and pull-offs are just as important as the notes

themselves, so take good care to play them as cleanly as possible. This is especially important in spots like measure 6, where things can get tricky. Begin the bar with your second, third, and first fingers fretting strings 4, 3, and 2, respectively. Keep those fingers in place as you individually pick strings 5–2 and then pull off to the open third string, followed by the open fourth and then the second. After that, hammer on the fifth-fret G with your second finger, without picking the note.

At first it might feel clumsy to play moves like these, but as with anything new, they'll soon be in your muscle memory if you approach things slowly and systematically. **AG**



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**\*Tuning: D $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  E $\flat$  A $\flat$  E $\flat$ , Capo III**

### Moderately

**A** **G** **D** **A** **D**

*let ring throughout*

**\*Music sounds a major second higher than written.**

4

A D Em7 A7 Aadd4

4 0 2 0 0 2 5 3 2 4 2 0 5 5 (5) 0 0 0 0 0 0 4 4 4 4

15 **Em7** **A7** *\*play three times* **To Coda 1** **To Coda 2**

2 5 3 5 5 4 (4) 0 0 4 5 (5) 0 0 4 5 (5) 0 0

2 5 3 5 5 4 (4) 0 0 4 5 (5) 0 0 4 5 (5) 0 0

**\*last pass, play four times**

**Cont. on p. 66**



Cont. from p. 65

**D.S. al Coda 1**

Musical notation for measures 19-22. Chords: A<sub>9</sub>, D<sub>m</sub>(add9), A, D, G, A. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on the left. Fingerings and accidentals are shown throughout.

**⊕ Coda 1**

Musical notation for measures 23-25. Chords: A<sub>add4</sub>, C<sub>9</sub><sup>6</sup>, G<sub>9</sub><sup>6</sup>. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on the left. Fingerings and accidentals are shown throughout.

Musical notation for measures 26-29. Chords: A, C<sub>9</sub><sup>6</sup>, G<sub>9</sub><sup>6</sup>, A<sub>sus2</sub>, A. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on the left. Fingerings and accidentals are shown throughout. A repeat sign is present at the end of measure 28.

**D.S. al Coda 2**

Musical notation for measures 30-33. Chords: A<sub>9</sub>, D<sub>m</sub>(add9), A, D, G, A. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on the left. Fingerings and accidentals are shown throughout.

**⊕ Coda 2**

Musical notation for measures 34-37. Chords: A<sub>add4</sub>. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on the left. Fingerings and accidentals are shown throughout. A repeat sign is present at the end of measure 35. The instruction "play three times" is written above the staff. The notation ends with a "rit." (ritardando) marking.

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# Why is My Action Suddenly High?

Several factors can lead to sudden changes in string height

BY MAMIE MINCH

**Q:** *I have a relatively new Martin dreadnought guitar, and I generally love how it feels and sounds. I don't get as many chances to pick it up as I might like. After not playing it for a couple of months this spring, I pulled it out of the case and the action felt like it was a mile high. It's really hard to play, and my left hand is getting a workout just trying. It wasn't like this the last time I played it. What happened? Is it my fault for neglecting the guitar? How should I fix it?*

—Frank, Brooklyn, New York

**A:** You sound like a lot of guitar owners that I talk to in our shop. You get busy, and end up not playing your beloved guitar for a while, only to find that when you pick it back up, things don't feel as good. Before you turn yourself in to Guitar Protective Services, let's think about what may have happened and why.

I'd like to take a moment to say that I'm not a tech who thinks that super-low action is a desirable state for most guitars. When your action is too low, it may be easier to press the strings down, but lots of tonal nuance, frequency range, and volume can be lost. When it comes to action, lower is not necessarily better. But I digress; back to the problem at hand. You said that all of a sudden, the action feels really high, and it's difficult to play. Action, or string height, plays a crucial role in how comfortable it is to play your guitar. High action could be due to a lot of different reasons—some of them are easy fixes.

First, your neck may have bowed forward. Changes in temperature and humidity during

Changes in temperature or humidity can raise your strings above the fretboard.



OLIVIA WISE

the spring could have contributed to the wood of your neck pulling forward with string tension. Some measure of this is to be expected during a guitar's life, and may have happened whether you were there to see it or not. It's hard to say whether this applies to your guitar, but sometimes the wood used to make a guitar neck hasn't seasoned long enough, and still has a bit of moving around to do. If your neck has bowed forward for any of these reasons, we'd adjust it with your truss rod. Hopefully that would take care of most of the problem. This could generally be done during a setup, and maybe your tech would also take some height off the saddle.

Next, the neck itself may have pulled forward just a bit. In the case of a newer Martin like yours, the neck is held on to the body with two bolts. This issue will be clear if there is a little gap at the bottom of the heel, but sometimes it is more subtle, and not severe enough to leave a visible gap. There is a plate stuck onto the neck block with your serial number on it, and to fix this problem, we would start by removing it. Under it, we can access the bolts. We simply tighten them all the way down and re-attach the cover plate.

It's also possible that the neck pulled forward a lot. If the block has rotated forward

some, and if that has pulled the arch built into the guitar's back towards being flatter, the neck angle may need to be reset. This is a simpler affair when the neck is held on with bolts than when it is glued on with a dovetail joint. We would unglue the fingerboard extension, unbolt the neck, and re-carve the heel to fit at the correct angle. Once it's re-attached, it'll feel and sound better.

One more thing to consider is that your bridge could be pulling up. It's possible that while your guitar was in its case this spring, the changing temperature and humidity contributed to the glue joint under the bridge failing. If the bridge did become unglued and pulled up off the guitar's top any amount, your action could get higher.

Lastly, it could be some combination of these things. Only your luthier or guitar tech will be able to tell. Get thee to the repair shop so that you can get back to enjoying your guitar. As always, you can help minimize wood moving around by doing your best to keep your instruments in a stable environment. In a perfect world, we'd have homes that were 70 degrees and 50 percent humidity, year round. Of course, we can only do our best in that regard, but thankfully it's usually enough to avoid involving GPS!

AG

## GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or a topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* resident repair expert Mamie Minch. Send an email titled "Repair Expert" to Senior Editor Greg Olwell at [greg.olwell@stringletter.com](mailto:greg.olwell@stringletter.com), and he'll forward it to Mamie.



Mamie Minch



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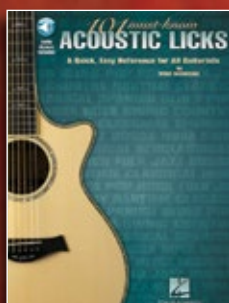
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by Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers  
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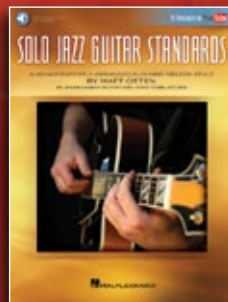


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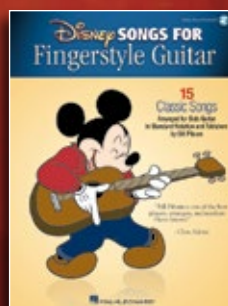


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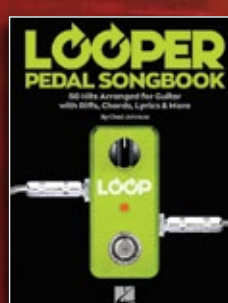
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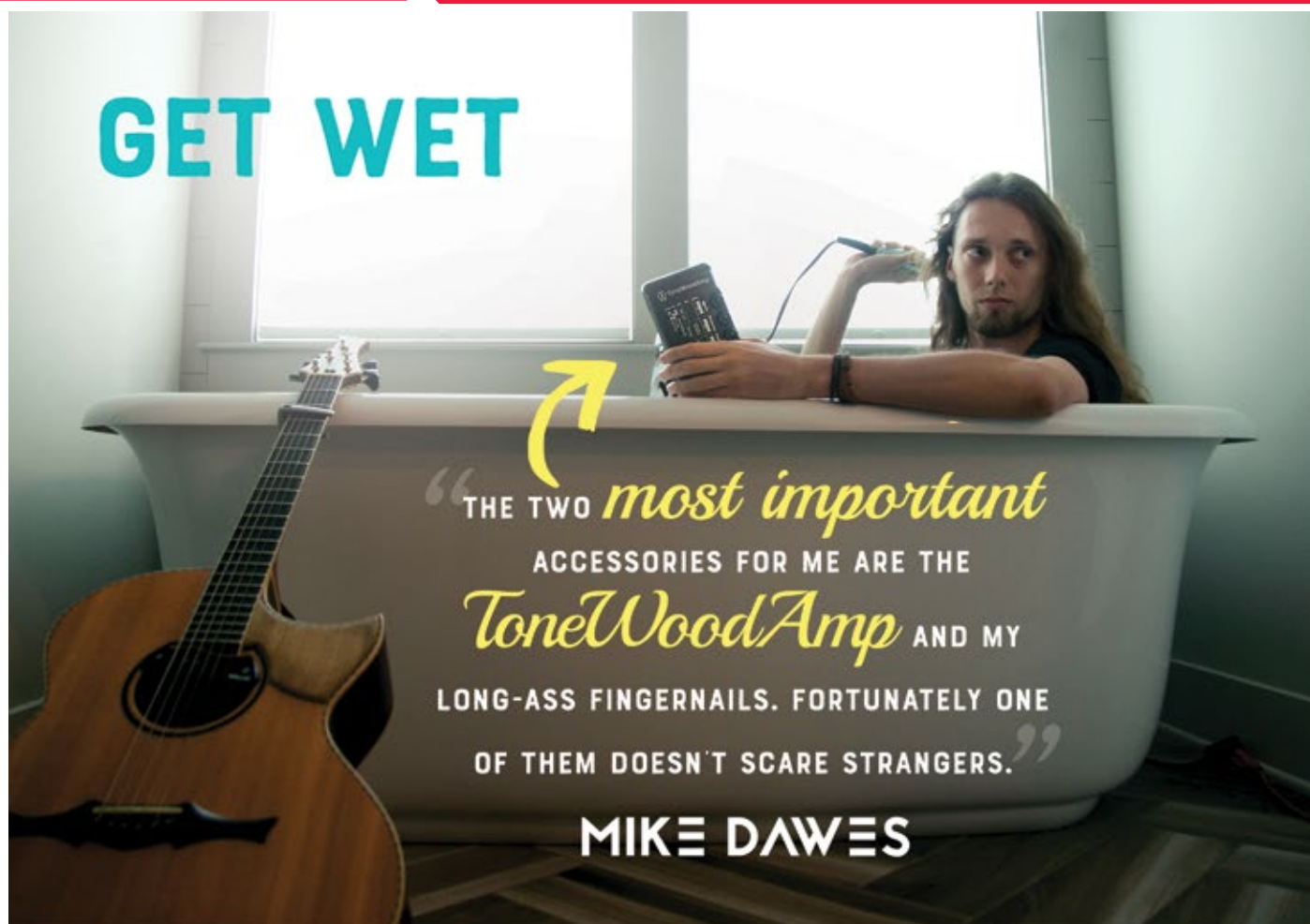
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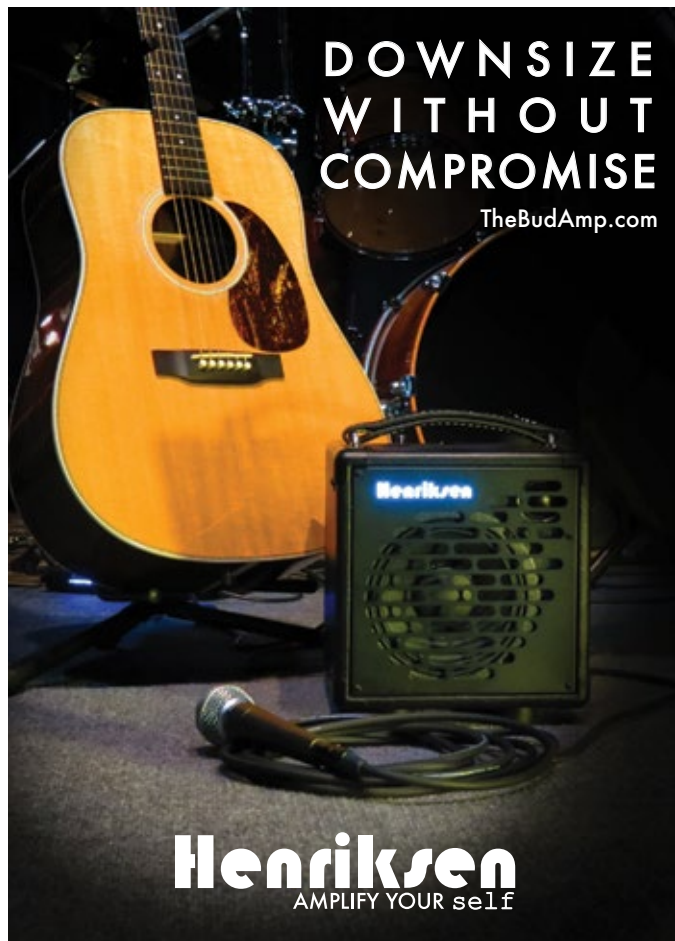
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# Cort CJ-Retro

A budget jumbo with echoes of the Fab Four

BY CRAIG DALTON

The pleasingly vintage look of the Cort CJ-Retro, a new and affordable jumbo-size acoustic-electric, brings to mind great instrument/player pairings such as John Lennon and his 1962 Gibson J-160E. With its patterned merbau wood fretboard, white binding and pickguard, espresso sunburst top, and matte-finished mahogany back and sides, the CJ-Retro will appeal to diehard live performers and to players seeking elegant eye candy. None of that means much, of course, if the instrument doesn't sound good, but this one comes through nicely.

I first played the CJ-Retro on a community festival stage through a Yamaha PA system. In dropped-D tuning, the guitar had a warm tone, thanks to its mahogany back and sides. The guitar's Fishman Neo-D magnetic humbucker pickup and VTB EQ created a well-balanced delivery across all the strings. In electric-guitar fashion, the volume, treble, and bass controls are mounted on the guitar's top, which is great for quick adjustments on stage. Whether finger-picked or strummed, the guitar's tonality came through clean, clear, and nicely balanced. I was also impressed with how well it stayed in tune outdoors on a hot summer day.

In the more controlled environment of my home studio, I tested the CJ-Retro's electronics

through a Bose L1 Model II. The magnetic humbucker sounded as expected—more midrange-accented than the typical undersaddle pickup, perfect for playing single-note leads in a band setting. Low-string blues riffs and chord patterns are also real winners on this jumbo-sized model, which delivers good clarity for the price.

The CJ-Retro's spruce top adds some nice brightness and balance to the frequency mix. As the owner of a higher-priced, all-mahogany

**The Cort CJ-Retro would make a great choice for new players who want a quality acoustic-electric at an affordable price . . .**

guitar, I appreciated how the spruce makes the CJ-Retro sound a bit punchier in the midrange frequencies. When I tuned the guitar to open G, it fared well with the change in string tension, and it assumed a pronounced bluesy feel, staying in tune even when I subjected it to vigorous pull-offs and forceful strumming.

The jumbo body size, white binding, and pickguard set against the espresso sunburst top pattern and matte-finished mahogany back and

sides create a very attractive overall design. It's a bit odd that the tuning pegs' crème color doesn't match the guitar's bright white binding, but that's certainly not a deal breaker.

Naturally, a guitar in this price range will have some compromises. Budget guitars like the CJ-Retro tend to need tweaking more often than costlier instruments, a definite tradeoff for the price point. As delivered, the CJ's action was a little too high, but a truss-rod adjustment made a big difference. The all-laminated body and top may not be the ideal configuration for natural tone, but it seemed to help amplify the guitar and keep it in tune. Thanks to its jumbo body size, the Retro boasts enough acoustic volume for campfire sing-alongs and house parties; unplugged, its tone is fairly bright in the middle but not quite as satisfyingly warm as when amplified.

The Cort CJ-Retro would make a great choice for new players who want a quality acoustic-electric at an affordable price, or intermediate players who are just beginning to play live. It will also appeal to experienced guitarists who need a backup instrument onstage, perhaps with alternative tunings. Overall, it's a playable, affordable instrument blessed with terrific old-school looks. **AG**







## SPECS

**BODY** 14-fret jumbo body; laminated mahogany back and sides; laminated spruce top; white pickguard; white-and-black plastic binding, top and back; sunburst top, natural back and sides, matte finish

**NECK** 25-5/8"-scale mahogany neck with "slim C" shape; 20-fret merbau fingerboard with dual rectangle inlays and white plastic binding and heel cap; 1-11/16"-wide nut; nickel open-back tuners with crème oval knobs; satin finish

**ELECTRONICS** Fishman Neo-D single-coil magnetic soundhole pickup and Fishman VTB active preamp, with treble, bass, and volume controls; amber top hat/bell knobs

**OTHER** Merbau bridge with compensated saddle; D'Addario EXP16 coated phosphor-bronze light (.012–.053) strings

**PRICE** \$299 (MAP)

**MADE IN** Indonesia

cortguitars.com





# Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Q-Discrete Parlor Guitar

A denim-blue blues box for guitar on the go

BY BILL LEIGH

Looking for an eye-catching parlor guitar under \$500? Try the Roadhouse Q-Discrete from Canadian guitar builder Art & Lutherie. A division of Godin Guitars, Art & Lutherie crafts its instruments in the small town of Princeville, Québec, using all Canadian woods.

A&L's Roadhouse series of parlor-size guitars is inspired by compact "blues box" instruments that were the frequent traveling companions of bygone blues legends. These guitars often had a meaty sound for such a small size, and the Roadhouse Q-Discrete continues that tradition with a fairly full acoustic voice and an even livelier sound when plugged in. Its Q-Discrete preamp brings the Roadhouse to life with shimmering overtones and full lows.

I didn't hop on any freight trains, but I certainly enjoyed toting the Q-Discrete around town with its modest weight, petite profile, and comfy gig bag. Wherever I roamed, the instrument's aesthetic garnered praise. With its denim-blue finish and amber Les Paul-style top-hat volume and tone knobs built into the top, the Q-Discrete definitely has a unique look that catches people's attention.

I kind of liked how it matched my jeans, both in color and in the way the stain settled into the wood grain, in ripples on the solid spruce top and long, clear grain lines on the wild cherry sides and back. The shapely white pearlescent pickguard adds a nice contrasting touch, along with the deep hues of the chocolate-colored binding, rosewood bridge and fingerboard, and maple neck. The small, straight headstock adds to the overall vintage vibe, as do the brass tuning machines and white keys.

Acoustically, the Roadhouse Q-Discrete didn't sound huge, but it was big enough to hang in a multi-guitar jam. It has a natural richness in the mids and lows, while conveying shimmering high-end overtones. Its natural voice blended sweetly when strummed, then stood out with a distinctive solo voice. The Q-Discrete's sonic strength really comes through when amplified. It has an even feel across the spectrum, from resonant lows to radiant highs, nicely tamed or unleashed by the tone knob.

The A&L Roadhouse Q-Discrete is an affordable, comfortable grab-and-go guitar that feels and sounds great. As for the first song you should play on it, how about "Forever in Blue Jeans"? **AC**

## SPECS

**BODY** Solid spruce top with laminated wild cherry back and sides

**NECK** 24.84"-scale silver leaf maple neck with 20-fret rosewood fingerboard; 1.72" GraphTech Tusq nut

### ELECTRONICS

Q-Discrete preamp with top-mounted volume and tone controls

**OTHER** Gig bag included

**PRICE** \$479 (MAP)

**MADE IN** Canada

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# D'Addario Self-Centering Cradle Capo

Efficient and affordable yoke-style capo

BY GREG OLWELL

Long relegated to very specific kinds of players and styles, cradle capos seem to be having a moment in 2018. Just about everyone who makes a device for quickly changing keys is offering this type of capo, which fits around the neck of your guitar and uses a rear-mounted screw to pull the bar down onto the strings. String powerhouse D'Addario jumps into the pool with the Self-Centering Cradle Capo (\$69.99 MAP), one of the lowest-cost cradle capos available.

Designed in part by instrument innovator Ned Steinberger, the Cradle Capo is made from stainless steel. It fits easily around a guitar's

neck—just squeeze the sides together with your fretting hand to latch the hinged crossbar into place, and then adjust the tension with the knurled thumbscrew. The non-marring rubber-coated crossbar and rear plate are the only parts that directly contact your guitar.

I tried the D'Addario on a variety of neck profiles, from Taylor's speedy modern shape to a clubby vintage style to a soft-V. It worked great on all of them—easily adjusting up to the seventh fret to play the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun" and down at the first fret for Johnny Cash tunes.

Cradle capos tend to be expensive because of the precision work needed to make them



function properly. D'Addario's Self-Centering Cradle Capo works efficiently and smoothly, though it doesn't feel as ultra-refined as some of its more expensive competitors. At well under \$100, the D'Addario Cradle Capo is an affordable and solid-performing solution for guitarists interested in checking out this style of capo. [daddario.com](http://daddario.com)

# Zero Glide Nut System

For making a change from a standard to a zero-fret nut

BY GREG OLWELL

Many guitarists associate instruments with zero frets with the cheap import guitars made in the '60s and '70s. These guitars were often riddled with problems, and the zero fret became a visual cue for a guitar to avoid. But, given that players no less discerning about tone than Chet Atkins and Django Reinhardt favored zero fret-equipped guitars, they might be worth reconsidering.

A zero fret removes some setup burden off of a standard nut by placing a fret where the front of the nut normally is, reducing the nut's role to regulating string-to-string spacing. A properly set up guitar with a zero fret can have excellent intonation and buttery action, and some players claim that fretted and open notes sound more alike and sustain longer.

The Zero Glide replacement nut (\$30, direct) is an easily reversible and non-permanent retrofit for guitarists who may want to explore these

benefits on a favorite guitar. I've played many instruments with zero frets, and when they're set up well, I've found them to be effective. So, using guidelines on Zero Glide's website, I measured the nut width and string spacing on a Seagull S6 dreadnought-style guitar that we often use as a testbed here at AG, and ordered a pre-cut nut. (Note: While I went the DIY route—which involved trimming and filing the zero fret and shaping and fitting the new, pre-slotted bone nut—I'd recommend having a professional handle your conversion, for a clean look.)

Once installed, the pre-cut slots were perfectly spaced, and I immediately noticed much less of a difference between the sound of open and fretted strings. Notes on both open-position chords and runs that mixed fretted notes with open notes sounded more balanced and in-tune than with the stock nut. It's also worth mentioning that I



didn't notice any intonation issues after installation. Notes were in-tune up and down the fingerboard, and fretting notes in the first and second position was noticeably easier.

If you're the kind of player who spends a lot of time playing runs and chords at the end of the neck, you might appreciate the subtle but noticeable effect the Zero Glide adds to your guitar. And if you don't care for it, changing back to a standard nut is easy.

[goldtonemusicgroup.com/zeroglide](http://goldtonemusicgroup.com/zeroglide)



**Mark Vickness**  
*Places*  
(markvickness.com)



Mark Vickness

## PLAYLIST

# An Aural Map of Places and Emotions

Fingerstylist Mark Vickness' solo debut is varied and virtuosic

BY PAT MORAN

Two years in the making, *Places* draws on evocative landscapes ranging from a mist-shrouded inlet to a wind-swept mountain peak to create an aural journal of guitarist Mark Vickness' travels. On a straightforward level, it's a deeply personal, family-centered project—Vickness' wife and two children contribute photos and poetry to the CD's liner notes, and the guitarist's deceased adoptive mother receives a heartfelt tribute with a shimmering rendition of Elisha Hoffman's spiritual "I Must Tell Jesus." But Vickness' uncanny ability to evoke the complex emotions linked to these times and places transcends the specific and catapults his travelogue into the universal.

As one half of the acoustic jazz-fusion duo Glass House, Vickness has previously released three albums and one EP, but *Places* marks his solo debut. The fingerstylist makes the most of this opportunity to showcase the limitless sounds and textures that can be achieved primarily with his custom Michael Greenfield steel-string guitars. The exceptions to Vickness' one-guitar-per-tune rule are his tumbling tabla run on "Flight of the Rays," the squadron of strings—lowing cello, swooning viola, and

cross-stitch violin—that knit the sinuous strands of the nine-minute "Wonder Lake Suite" into a restless coda, and the spectral looped and/or overdubbed textures that thread throughout the album.

"A Thousand Islands," named for the lake in central California where Vickness proposed to his wife, weaves a tapestry of buzzing frets, pinging harmonics, and syncopated guitar-top taps that nod to Michael Hedges' playing style. But moments later, the same composition dives into a warren of Baroque serpentine passages that recall the picking of Andrés Segovia disciple Christopher Parkening.

Playing a custom Matt Mustapick guitar, Vickness mimics the sympathetic resonance strings heard on an Indian sarod on the galloping and sprightly "Wind River." A double-necked Ovation, with six strings on one neck and 12 on the other, produces sonar-like harmonics and wavering zither-like tintinnabulations on "Flight of the Rays," a snapshot of manta rays Vickness saw skimming gracefully through the sea off the coast of Hawaii.

The jagged Alaskan coastline emerges from a fog bank on "Prince William Sound," where

slipknot picking threads like a gamelan through percussive swipes and chugging clockwork tapping that imitates a ship's engine. A silvery glissando parts like a sheer waterfall to reveal resonating countermelodies and insistent squawking strums on "Bishop Pass."

"New York City," named after the urban hub frequented by Long Island native Vickness, is depicted as a peripatetic subway ride from neighborhood to borough and back. Here Vickness' twanging, radiating chords and springy, hammered dulcimer-like taps suggest a train echoing in tunnels and clattering across trestles. The Big Apple is revisited in "NYC 2.0," which utilizes the same tunings and material as the previous composition for a grimmer and funkier instrumental. As arpeggiated picking on the upper strings keeps pace with a slinky backbeat on the lower, Vickness spins airy and chiming textures reminiscent of the multilayered ghost drones employed by the Velvet Underground.

A varied and virtuosic "photo album" of remote, gritty, and mystical locales, *Places* traces a map of Vickness' emotional life, while sketching the subtle and winding pathways creativity takes on its way to fruition. **AC**



### Cecilia Zabala

*The Color of Silence*

(Acoustic Music/Rough Trade)

**A sensuous and mysterious Argentine excursion**

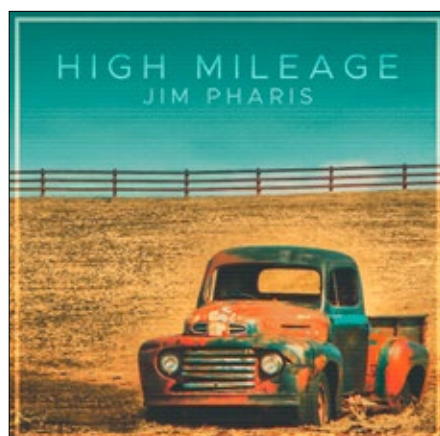
Playing acoustic, seven-string Spanish, and requinto guitars, Cecilia Zabala weaves a tapestry of tango rhythms, jazz progressions, and Argentine folk melodies on *The Color of Silence*. But that is only part of the sonic web the Buenos Aires native spins. Zabala's feathery, free-falling voice is the other featured instrument on this solo set, where guitar and vocals cradle and enfold each other to create a sensuous and mysterious effect.

Rising and falling in tandem with her cross-picked gossamer guitar, Zabala's seesawing scat singing mimics choral liturgical music on "La otra mitad." On the sinuous title track, Zabala's vocals flit from airy jazz to soothing lullaby as they torque around her guitar's polyphonic textures. It's a piece that manages to evoke both Latin jazz and music from the Baroque era without inducing whiplash.

On the busy but uncluttered "Detrás del horizonte," harp-like fluting on the upper strings remains tethered to Zabala's twanging bass pulse, while sparkling clusters of notes drift and scatter like fading fireworks. Even instrumentals like "Princesa," where Zabala's ethereal voice is absent, conjure an otherworldly mood. Around a bell-toned note that tolls repeatedly like a distant beacon, Zabala's acoustic guitar pirouettes and prowls like a fairy tale princess pacing her ivory tower.

With *The Color of Silence*, Zabala transports the listener to a dream world, where her delicate virtuosic playing creates a mood, a setting, and a space for vocals that range from light-as-soufflé aria to shamanic incantation.

—PM



### Jim Pharis

*High Mileage*

(jimpharis.com)

**Solid set of originals, blues, and gospel covers**

The rusting pickup truck on the cover of *High Mileage*, the third full-length album from Louisiana-based singer-songwriter Jim Pharis, is the subject of the collection's cantering, bent-note title track. Over a stinging razor-wire riff, Pharis' weathered, fraying vocal compares the automotive hulk to his own biological shell. He concludes that both may be battered but they'll get the job done, an attitude that serves as the theme for this set of originals and country blues and gospel covers. Pharis does more than accept human frailties here; he cherishes them with infectious good humor.

"Five Alarm Fire" celebrates a high-strung girlfriend, "jumpy as a cat watching a snake," with suitably rattled accompaniment, where Pharis' plummeting repeating notes hail down like raindrops hitting a tin roof. Here, as on a handful of other tunes, A.J. Primeaux's fluttering, wailing harmonica lends color to Pharis' swooping and filament-fine guitar.

Pharis' slide guitar slithers and snaps forward like a rubber band on a cover of Oscar Woods' "Don't Sell It, Don't Give it Away," a tale of romantic woe and rejuvenation. Plangent ringing notes churn like a waterwheel on "Drift Away," a placid rumination on mortality that turns uplifting. And speaking of uplift, Pharis' cross-picking percolates with banjo-style rattle and pop on a version of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's "Up Above My Head I Hear Music in the Air." Here, Pharis reminds us that the spirit moves us all—even those of us who have to coax our rattletrap human chassis to the pearly gates.

—PM



### Ahi

*In Our Time*

(22nd Sentry)

**Everyman troubadour delivers striking sophomore set**

On this second album by Canadian troubadour Ahi (pronounced "eye," it's the initials of his name, Ankinoah Habah Izarh), the artist takes a sonic stance that instantly, and effortlessly, commands attention. He rails with a gritty, heartfelt delivery that brings several well-known journeymen firmly to mind—Springsteen, Seger, Mellencamp, and Garland Jeffreys chief among them—courtesy of exuberant anthems that ring with both passion and purpose. Songs with titles such as "Breakin' Ground," "We Want Enough," "In Our Time," "Just Pray," and "On My Side" affirm that sense of urgency and the desire to share his rowdy resolve. The rallying cries of "Straight Ahead" and "We Want Enough" provide a stirring, seismic call to arms, a result of the drive, determination, and exaltation inherent in each carousing chorus and riveting refrain.

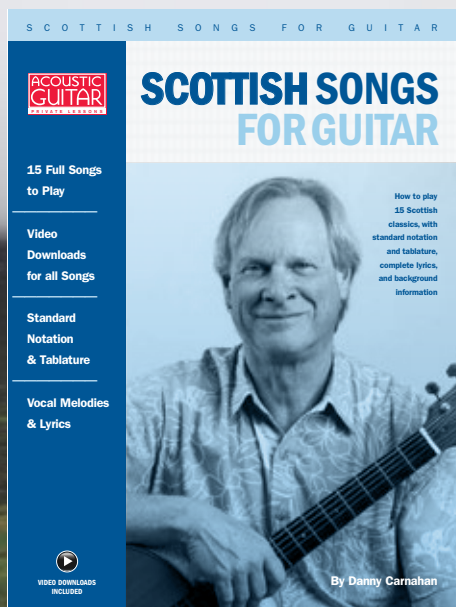
To Ahi's credit, he manages to temper his sentiments effectively and affirmatively. Edge and anguish may be prime components, but the arrangements are driven by acoustic guitars carefully textured beneath the rumble. While the music often trends towards rougher terrain, several songs ("The Honest One," "Five Butterflies," "Made It Home") are defined by the tone and texture of strummed guitars and the subtle shimmer that they emanate. Likewise, "In Our Time," "Penny," and "On My Side" find Ahi's mellower melodies spiraling into a final emphatic wail.

Ultimately, *In Our Time* is one of those rare albums that resonates even at the outset. Both reflective and resolute, it's very well suited for these tumultuous times.

—Lee Zimmerman



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# Two 1931 Kel Kroydon KK-1s

**A pair of guitars, built together,  
meets again 86 years later**

**BY MARK STUTMAN**

**K**el Kroydon-branded instruments were built by Gibson from late 1929 into 1932. They were the company's first budget brand, and unlike later, lower-cost Gibson lines (such as Kalamazoo, Cromwell, and others), they were built quite similarly to their counterparts. The Kel Kroydon flattops are structurally identical to the L-1 and L-2 Gibson models built during this period, the one exception being that they were made without truss rods in their necks. Squared-off headstocks with a unique red logo and natural-finished tops set the Kel Kroydons apart cosmetically from their counterparts, but their remarkably light build and X-bracing make them sound unmistakably Gibson.

These two Kel Kroydon KK-1 flattops share the same Factory Order Number, FON 9956, indicating that they were built alongside each other in late 1931. They were likely transported from Kalamazoo to Toronto, Canada, in the same shipment sometime in early 1932. Eighty-six years later, they've been reunited at Folkway Music in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, where they were separately brought within a month of each other by heirs of the original owners. Both instruments arrived in need of very similar restoration work. The tops of the guitars are perfect, without loose braces, cracks, or deflection—and the backs of each are cracked similarly. The two guitars' bridges are still perfectly glued down, as well. It is interesting to note how the years have affected these sister Gibsons so similarly.

While it remains unknown how many Kel Kroydon guitars were built as part of FON 9956, or if this batch shipped to Canada in its entirety, the research into Gibson's history during these formative years of acoustic guitar development is unending and continually fascinating.

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